

Executive Summary: Position Statement of the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment Inc. on Braille Literacy in Australia August 2024

# Aim

The aim of the Position Statement is to make explicit the fundamental right of quality instruction in braille literacy and numeracy for all pre-school and school-aged students with blindness and low vision throughout Australia, as a means of ensuring equity and excellence in education.

# Introduction to Braille

Braille is a tactile reading and writing system that consists of raised dots arranged in specific patterns within cells. Each cell contains up to six dots, arranged in two vertical columns of three dots each. These dots can be felt with the finger pads, enabling people to read using touch. By combining different dot patterns, braille allows for the representation of various written language elements or the print equivalent for literacy, mathematics, science, and music notation. The Unified English Braille code (UEB) is used in Australia and throughout the English-speaking world to create a standardised code for braille.

# Braille Literacy

SPEVI Inc. advocates that braille literacy for students with blindness or low vision is equivalent to print literacy for sighted students. Literacy empowers students to access information. Braille remains important in the 21st Century, and offers advantages over audio access because braille allows readers to physically interact with the text in a manner commensurate with print readers. Access to reading and writing through braille assists students with blindness and low vision opportunities to learn essential elements of literacy such as spelling and punctuation. Article 24.4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) recognises braille as a means of communication and emphasises the teaching and production of braille by qualified people who have the appropriate skills and experience.

# A Call to Action

The South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI Inc.) calls on Australian state and territory Education Departments to prioritise the following:

## Accessible learning environments

1. Accessible physical spaces and adequate braille signage for access to physical spaces with the school environment.
2. Braille production by trained braille transcribers and access to other tactile materials to support understanding of curriculum content.
3. Assistive technology needs to be supported within school systems. This may include provision of digital materials to enable students’ immediate access to braille through electronic braille devices.

## Resourcing

1. Recruit and retain Qualified Specialist Teachers (Vision Impairment) to provide adequate time to plan and implement literacy and numeracy lessons that ensure equitable access to learning braille.
2. Provision funding for the production and timely delivery of educational braille materials and instruction.
3. Target adequate resourcing for regional and remote students, staff and families to ensure equitable access to learning.

## Training

1. Ensure training to support professional learning in braille literacy and numeracy for classroom teachers and support personnel in schools.
2. Facilitate training for teachers and students in the effective use and maintenance of assistive technology.

The South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI Inc) is the major professional association for educators of students with vision impairments in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific region. SPEVI is the leading professional body to advocate for excellence and equity in education for students with blindness and low vision, including deafblindness and multiple disabilities.