

VISION AND LEARNING

If your child is experiencing difficulties with learning, it's important to eliminate any possible issues with their sight or visual function. Some children may benefit from specialised assessments.

Should my child have a further assessment?

The first step with any child is to have a full eye examination which free is of charge to you, being paid for by the NHS. This will check if there is any need for glasses or ocular health issues that could explain any visual difficulties. A child with difficulties who is found to have no significant refractive error (glasses prescription), or who presents with classic symptoms of specific learning difficulties such as "words jumping on the page" may then be recommended for further assessment. This further appointment is not covered by the NHS, and private fees will apply.

What should we expect?

There are 2 types of assessment which we can carry out, which are designed to detect any visual factors which may be contributing to a child's difficulties. The first is related to how well the two eyes are being used together and the second is for Meares-Irlen syndrome. These things may or may not be related to any diagnosed specific learning disability. Depending on the results of our initial investigations, we may recommend investigation of either or both of these things.

When evaluating how well the two eyes are being used together, your optometrist will concentrate on the co-ordination of the two eyes (binocular vision). Muscle weaknesses or strain found by these tests can certainly explain difficulty in sustaining focus when reading. They will also check your child's ability to focus on near objects in order to make text clear (accommodate). Should any of these tests find areas of weakness then simple eye exercises may be issued for your child to perform at home.

Your child can also be assessed for "Meares-Irlen Syndrome" which is a certain sensitivity for colour where using a prescribed coloured overlay increases the speed of reading. A recent study found that about 50% of school children will choose a coloured overlay as it improves the clarity of text and 20% will use their overlay long term voluntarily. 5% of these children read more than 25% faster. Should your child demonstrate an improvement

whilst using their selected individual overlay then a specific coloured A5 sheet will be issued. The child should never be forced to use the overlay, as voluntary use of the overlay is evidence in itself, that it is helping.

As well as the use of overlays, it is possible to arrange for your child to read their computer screen with the equivalent coloured overlay or they may prefer to have glasses with tinted lenses. These can be supplied either as a 'clip-on' for any existing glasses or made specifically in your child's prescription.

Follow up

Following your child's examination a full report will be provided for your reference and with your consent another report may be sent to your child's appropriate teacher so they are fully aware of our findings and recommendations. Most children are recommended to return 6-8 weeks after their initial assessment, when the results of exercises will be investigated and the effect of using the overlays discussed.

Please note

All our further testing and treatment recommendations are fully investigated and scientifically proven to be of benefit. There are many other vision training/tests available but currently there is a lack of scientific evidence to support them. We are not able to diagnose a specific learning disability. Our job is to try and find any visual factors which may be contributing to a child's difficulties. Our role is to work as part of a multi-disciplinary team with your child's teachers and educational psychologists.