



Special Schools Eye Care Service

Securing the future of eye care for children with special educational needs and disability



This essential service makes a massive difference to the lives of children with special educational needs, and their families. We know children with additional needs are 28 times more likely to have an eye condition but many of them simply find the experience of eye care in an unfamiliar setting, such as in a hospital or in primary care, too distressing. By eliminating this anxiety, we can help the 165,000 children attending special schools access life-transforming eye care and save sight.

Professor Julie-Anne Little
Optometrist, researcher on visual impairment and special needs, and Board member

Association of Optometrists

The Government has outlined support for the Special Schools Eye Care Service until April 2024.

We want to see a clear vision for the future and a long-term commitment to ensure that children with special educational needs have equitable access to eye healthcare.

SPECIAL SCHOOLS EYE CARE SERVICE

What patients are saying...

Hand on heart I can say stress-free access to eye care over the years means Kiyana is a different girl and is so much more confident now.

Dee, mum to Kiyana

I was amazed that actually he really needed glasses, as I would've found it hard to tell. But now he has them I can see how much he needs them!

Claire, mum to James

What optometrists are saying...

Children with special educational needs are often distressed and due to time constraints, we often have to rebook children back in or refer to paediatrics.

I'm lucky enough to be involved in the Special Schools Eye Care Service and have been for over 10 years in our area. It's something I feel passionately about and know that our children won't miss out if the service is commissioned nationally.

Children with SEN are **28 times more likely** to have an eye condition*

*SeeAbility. 2016. Children in Focus Campaign, 28 times more likely, Second year annual review.

About the service

The Special Schools Eye Care Service offers children with learning disabilities regular full vision and eye health assessments within their learning environment, delivered by optometrists, orthoptists, and dispensing opticians.

98% of parents with children with special educational needs agree there should be an eye care service in special schools¹

46% of children with SEN

had never had a sight test previously, yet close to half of children have a sight problem²

24 areas in the UK have no specialist service provision

for children with special educational needs even within local hospitals³

65% of optometrists feel children with SEN are experiencing a lower quality of life

due to inadequate access to NHS eye care⁴

10,900 children have benefited from eye care

as part of the Special Schools Eye Care Service so far⁵

The benefits...

- ➔ Every child attending a special school receives high-quality care, quickly — addressing health inequalities and improving health outcomes
- ➔ Hospital eye departments can focus on patients who need to be seen by an ophthalmologist
- ➔ Early diagnosis of eye health issues will prevent additional secondary care referrals, reducing the NHS backlog

References

1. SeeAbility, April 2023. 2. SeeAbility, Nov 2022. 3. Allen LC, Dillon A, Bowen P. Eye Care for Children in Special Schools: An Audit of Provision. *Br Ir Orthopt J*. 2021. 4. Voice of Optometry survey, Association of Optometrists, April 2023. 5. Neil O'Brien MP, Written question answered May 2023.



What we're calling for

- 1 Work with the AOP and the sector, to ensure a long-term commitment to the delivery of the Special Schools Eye Care Service
- 2 Consistent commissioning of the Special Schools Eye Care Service nationally in day and residential schools
- 3 Proper investment that covers the true cost of delivering the Special Schools Eye Care Service and funding secured for the future



A tremendous amount of work has already gone into setting up the service in many special schools in England – and children, parents and teachers love it. A commitment from Government to deliver the service nationally, across all UK special schools, is essential. ”

Adam Sampson
Chief Executive

Association of Optometrists

i For more information and how to get involved, visit www.aop.org.uk/sightforsen

#SightForSEN



Association of
Optometrists

The Association of Optometrists is the leading representative membership organisation for optometrists in the UK. For more information visit www.aop.org.uk