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27 March 2007

Dear Sirs

### **DfES Consultation - Making Good Progress**

We welcome this consultation to help improve every pupil's progress at school. It is vital that every child has the opportunity to develop socially and academically to the best of their ability. We want to ensure that a child's development is not impeded by poor vision or other eye health problems. Good eye sight is crucial to ensure children do well at school, interact with others and play sport safely. Many children do fall behind in school for a variety of reasons but in some cases it because of sight problems. We believe increasing awareness amongst teachers and parents of the importance of eye health for children will reduce the number of those falling behind at school.

Both teachers and parents need to be aware of the signs which could indicate a problem with a child's sight. Children who have difficulty concentrating, have behavioural problems, are holding books close to their eyes or are rubbing their eyes a lot, could have a problem with their sight. Teachers need to be aware of these signs and notify parents there could be a problem. This then needs to be checked by their local optometrist who will undertake an eye examination. All children under the age of 16 are entitled to a free NHS sight test but more needs to be done to publicise this to parents, teachers and other healthcare professionals.

Children with dyslexia are more prone to certain visual problems and in some cases they may have problems with reading. The most common eye problems in dyslexic children are a reduced ability to read close up and binocular instability.

For many eye problems such as amblyopia (lazy eye), there will be nothing upon which the parent or teacher can judge something is wrong. The child is unlikely to complain and to a teacher their vision will seem normal. There may not be any symptoms such as headaches or eyestrain which might alert an adult to a problem. Ideally all children should be screened for amblyopia (lazy eye) at or around school entry but given that universal screening programmes are not provided in all areas it is important for those children who are not screened to have a free NHS sight test.

Children with hearing impairments have a much higher incidence of visual problems. Due to their disability these children are even less likely to be able to communicate problems with their sight than other children. Deaf children rely strongly on their vision to develop communication skills and yet the prevalence of sight problems in deaf children is high. One study found a prevalence rate of 40 – 60% amongst deaf children. (Nikolopoulos TP et al Evidence-Based Overview of Ophthalmic Disorders in Deaf Children: A Literature Update *Otol. Neurotol* 27 S1-S24 2006). Undetected visual problems for very young deaf children negatively impacts on their ability to develop language skills, both spoken and/or sign skills.

We are happy for our views to be made public. If you require any further information about the points we have raised please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully



**Sir Anthony Garrett**  
General Secretary  
**Association of British  
& Dispensing Opticians**



**Bob Hughes**  
Chief Executive  
**Association of  
Optometrists**



**Bryony Pawinska**  
Chief Executive  
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