

INFORMATION RELEASE FOR HEAD TEACHERS



27th August 2016

Concerns about “Free Eye Testing Kits”

The British and Irish Orthoptic Society (BIOS) is writing in response to the “free school vision screening testing kits” for teachers and school staff and the “sight testing services” for older children that are being offered to schools in England by business corporations.

BIOS would like to raise awareness to Head Teachers to the national recommendations for the provision of vision screening in schools that were endorsed by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists. In December 2013 the UK National Screening Committee (NSC) recommended that screening for visual impairment should be offered to all children aged 4 – 5 years and this screening service should be organised and led by Orthoptists. <http://www.screening.nhs.uk/vision-child>. The guidance states the screening is for the detection of reduced vision in one or both eyes (amblyopia), and children who do not meet the pass vision should be referred for further assessment. Once the screening service is in place, screening for vision defects in older children should be discontinued.

The BIOS has evidence that changes to the funding of health care has led to an inconsistent approach to the commissioning of the 4 – 5 year vision screening by Local Authorities (LAs), with a lack of awareness of the NSC guidance and failure to provide for the onward care pathway for children who fail the vision screening and the quality assurance processes needed. There are reports that some LAs are not commissioning vision screening where it does not already exist or decommissioning existing programmes. The BIOS is working in partnership with eye care organisations to raise concerns about the provision of the 4 - 5 year old vision screening.

The free screening being offered to schools is not in line with the NSC guidance and is outside the recommendations of school vision screening, being offered to various age groups for which there is no evidence of benefit. It is important that children at reception age are screened in line with national guidance and that this is undertaken by a compliant and fully audited service.

Whilst schools may wish to consider other vision screening services, BIOS believes it is important the differences in the services being offered are understood.

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Registered Charity number: 326905 Limited company no: 1892427 Registered office: as above

The national guidelines provide a population-based examination of all children ensuring the 'at risk' and vulnerable children in the population are reached. This is essential to those who do not seek advice or think they are at risk, and show no signs or symptoms of the condition. This guidance ensures appropriate and efficient use of resources based on research evidence.

The BIOS is concerned about the possible implications to children if vision screening that does not follow NSC guidelines is adopted:

- Children may not receive vision screening at the appropriate age for specific eye conditions to be detected.
- At risk and vulnerable children will suffer if universal co-ordinated screening is not implemented.
- There is a risk that visual defects may be missed and / or not treated promptly.
- The potential for unidentified eye defects to become irreversible. This has serious risks of litigation.
- The undertaking of health checks which are not recommended by the NSC has the potential of producing unnecessary parental anxiety.

The BIOS has concerns for the implications to teaching staff and schools if the "free vision testing" being offered is adopted:

- The already busy schedules of teaching staff are added to in undertaking health checks which are not recommended by the NSC.
- What checks on training / governance will teaching staff receive in testing children's vision with the "free test kits"?
- What insurance do teaching staff have should a parent sue for missing a visual problem?
- What storage facilities do schools have for holding confidential information on pupil's health?
- How will the vision results be added to the local authority child health record systems?
- What arrangements are in place for children who 'fail' the vision tests to be 'referred' on to an eye specialist?
- There are associated child safeguarding issues if a parent / guardian does not act on the information that their child 'failed' a vision test and a pathway is not in place to follow up on this.
- There will be an expense to school of printing and sending results home to the parents.

The BIOS believes it is important the differences between the NSC guidance on universal screening of children at age 4 - 5 years and the 'free' corporate services being offered are understood. The BIOS hopes that this information can be passed to head teachers and teaching staff.

We are happy to provide any additional information and deal with any queries schools may have.

Please address any queries to bios@orthoptics.org.uk

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More information available here:

<http://www.parallelvisionmatters.org.uk/index.php/144/>

<https://phescreening.blog.gov.uk/2016/05/17/a-vision-for-vision-screening/>

<https://www.orthoptics.org.uk/news/3879690>

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