

In-School Eye Testing for pupils in Special Schools in England





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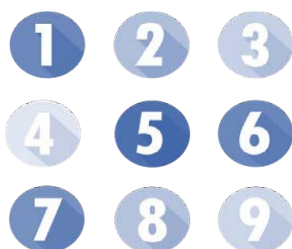
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Introduction



The NHS Long-Term Plan 2019 to 2029 said:



"There would be **in-school eye testing** for children and young people with a learning disability, autism, or both, who go to a special residential school."



A residential special school can have students staying overnight.



The in-school eye testing service is about:



- checking someone's eye health



- checking if someone needs glasses or contact lenses or other equipment



To work out the best way to offer in-school eye testing NHS England tried it out in **eighty-three** schools in England since **April 2021**.



After getting positive feedback for this programme on **19 June 2023** **NHS England** and **Department of Health and Social Care** said:



"From **April 2024** all children and young people in every special school in England will be entitled to in-school eye testing."



NHS England is now looking for organisations and groups that could offer in-school eye testing for all special schools in England.



The current programme will continue in the **eighty-three** special schools until new arrangements are in place from **April 2024**.



This document explains:



The current programme that started in **April 2021**.



What worked well and what did not work well in the current programme.



What the new programme could look like.



Please give us your feedback on the changes [by completing this online form](#)



or email your comments to:
england.specialschoolseyecareservice@nhs.net



The last day to give feedback is
Monday 16 October 2023



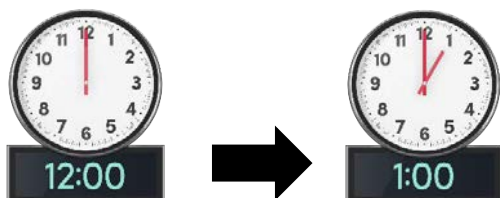
before **5pm.**



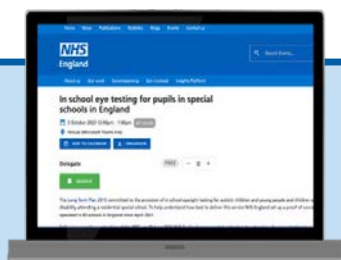
NHS England will also hold an online meeting for members of the public on:



Tuesday 3 October 2023



From **12pm** to **1pm**.



If you would like to attend the online meeting please use this [link to register](#)



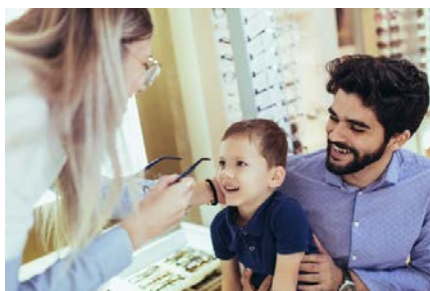
The current in-school eye testing programme



The current programme looked at the difficulties children and young people with a learning disability and/or autism have when using healthcare services.



In the past when NHS England has tried to put services in place it was not successful and only a few eye care organisations were interested.



The current programme allowed NHS England to try out the service and develop new ways of working with eye care teams. This included:



- a training course about offering an eye testing service in special schools



- how to be paid and how much for each eye test



- how to collect information about in-school eye tests



The current programme made sure the law was followed for each step of an eye test:



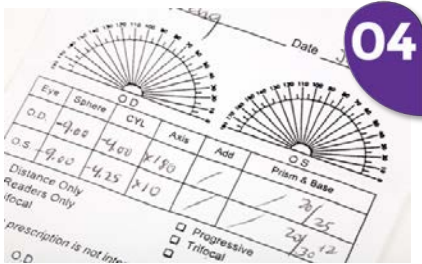
- examine the inside of the eye



- examine the outside of the eye



- test someone's vision to find out if they need glasses



- issue a prescription or statement



- keep a full record of the test and prescription



The law applies wherever an eye test takes place for either adults or children.



The health professional decides how to carry out the in-school eye test depending on the needs of the patient.



NHS England asked optometrists and dispensing opticians to say if they were interested in taking part in the current programme.



Their applications included their name, address and how far they would travel to offer services.



NHS England then matched optometrists and dispensing opticians who could work together to form an eye care team.



The dispensing optician advises on the best lenses and frames for the child or young person.



In most cases the teams worked well together.



In some cases, the teams could not work together, or a team could not be matched.



Contracts were only awarded to teams of:



- one optometrist



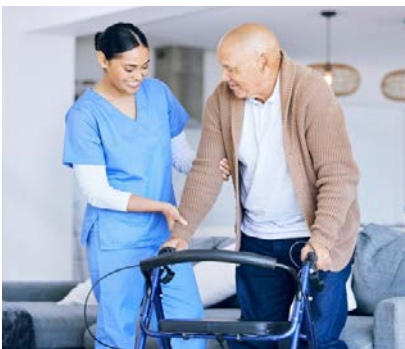
- one dispensing optician



Each eye care team was given a list of equipment, drawn up by the working group.



NHS England offered grants to help to pay for the equipment.



The list of equipment for in-school eye testing was much longer than is needed for other services such as home care.



The eye care teams:



- worked with special schools who wanted to take part in the programme



- set up in-school eye testing clinics at the special schools



For the current programme, parents or carers only needed to tell the eye care teams if they did not want their child to have an eye test.



Children and young people would get an eye test unless:



- their parents or carers removed them from the current programme



- they were already getting eyecare from the hospital or a High Street optician



Eye care teams were paid an agreed fee for each in-school eye test.



This was paid for by NHS England.



An in-school eye test report written by the eye care team was sent to:

- the special school
- the parent/carer



The in-school eye test report was about any changes to support the child or young person's eye health needs at school or home.



Report on the current programme



Work on an evaluation report about the current programme started in August 2022.



NHS England worked with the special schools and eye care teams to find out:



- what was good about the programme
- what did not work



NHS England looked at the positive comments about the current programme made by:



- special schools



- parents or carers



- eye care teams



But there were some issues with the current programme such as:



- consent



- working with parents



- eye health care offered by the NHS in other care settings



NHS England worked with NHS staff who plan and buy services about how the new eye care service could run.



NHS England also looked at information about eye testing carried out during the current programme. This included:



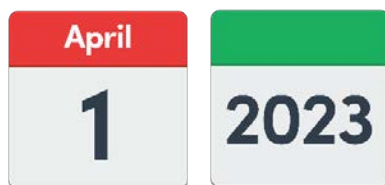
- what the NHS should do for equality groups



- public information on special educational needs in special schools in England



NHS England also looked at research papers about the support needs of children and young people who go to special schools in England.



The current programme changed from **1 April 2023** to make it the same as NHS eye testing offered to all children and young people.



So children and young people at special schools get the same amount as an **NHS optical voucher** to pay towards:



- one pair of glasses on most occasions



- two pairs of glasses on some occasions



NHS patients at High Street opticians would get the same voucher.



Research found that the in-school eye testing in special schools worked well because:



- children and young people at special schools have more eye sight problems



- not many children or young people at special schools use eye care services



Feedback from the current programme supports an in-school eye testing service for all special schools in England.



Most children who took part in the current programme had not used High Street opticians or eye care services at home.



Other research about children and young people at special schools suggests there is a need for eye care services in special schools.

Information collected by NHS
England during the current
programme showed that:



- **fifty-three per cent** of the children and young people who had an in-school eye test said they never had one before



- over **three hundred** referrals were made to other eye care services after they had an eye test at school



- eye health issues were found in children and young people which may not have been found



At all special schools:



- **three thousand six hundred and sixty-two** children and young people had eye tests for the first time



- **three thousand and fifty-seven** children and young people received glasses



- about **eleven per cent** of children and young people received glasses for the **first time**



Most parents and schools were positive about the current programme.



NHS England does not think all special schools will support in-school eye testing.

Questions

1. What do you think about it?

☐ Good

☐ Bad

☒ Not sure

Not all specials schools that took part in the current programme replied to the survey.



The current programme means schools need to offer:

- space to do the eye tests
- places to store equipment
- support from school staff



NHS England should make sure as many schools as possible want to take part in a **new in-school eye testing programme**.



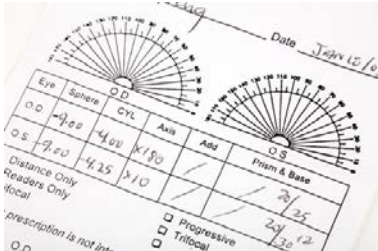
So we need to make it easier for schools to take part.



Feedback suggests that a written report about each child or young person's eye test should be continued in the new programme.



A good in-school eye test programme in special schools should include:



- a written prescription



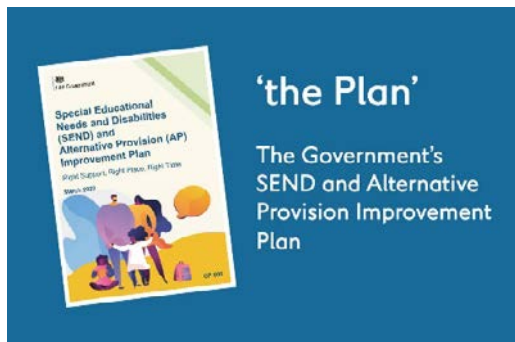
- advice on better vision such as better lighting and classroom seating



- assistance for children with a limited field of vision



This would support schools to meet reasonable adjustment standards.



The standards are in the Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan



which came out in March 2023.



Clinical experts have said there is not much difference between:



- the eye tests in special schools



- the eye tests in other places such as the High Street or a hospital



We understand that most children may need reasonable adjustments to complete the in-school eye test such as:



- more time or another appointment



- more or different equipment



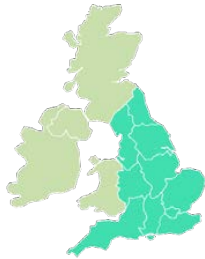
- a report which explains any adjustments including new lenses



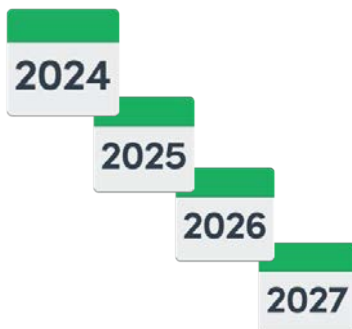
The New In-School Eye Testing Programme



The new in-school eye testing programme will include the benefits of the current programme.



The new programme will be offered to all special schools in England.



The programme will include eye tests for all children and young people in special schools **every year** or more often if they need it.



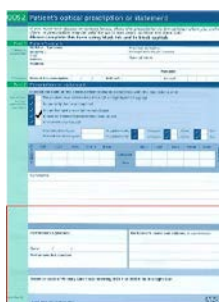
All children and young people must get parent or carer consent.



Parents or carers should be invited to the in-school eye test appointment.



Every child and young person who needs frames and lenses will be able to get help from the NHS towards the cost.



The amount will be the same as an **NHS optical voucher** available from High Street opticians.



The parent or carer may need to pay something if the cost of the frame and lenses is more than the **NHS optical voucher**.



The parent or carer should decide if the money helps to pay for:



- the frames offered by the eye care team at school



- frames from a High Street optician



Each child and young person will get an eye health report.



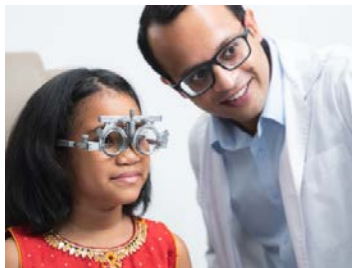
Schools who want to take part in the in-school eye testing programme will work with NHS staff who plan and buy services.



The eye care teams that offer the in-school eye testing programme should have a good working relationship with the school and the school community.



Then they can tell all the children and parents or carers about:



- the in-school eye testing service



- the eye health issues that children and young people at special schools may have



Eye care teams need to make sure they check if children and young people have also been to:



- High Street opticians



- other eye care services such as at a hospital



This will make sure children and young people do not have the same tests again at special schools when they have already been to the High Street or a hospital.



Our work on the current programme shows that changes need to be made in these areas:



- how eye care teams are planned and paid for



- getting parent or carer consent for in-school eye testing



- working with parents or carers to select frames



- making sure support is the same as the standard NHS support offer



These changes should make sure the new in-school eye testing programme includes the benefits of the current programme.



The new programme would make sure eye care teams:



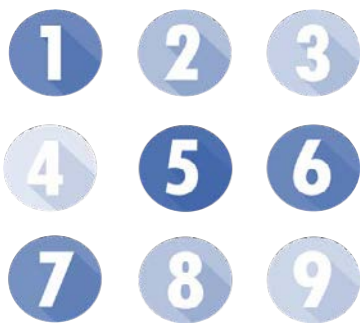
- do not need to fill in as many forms



- offer a service that meets the needs of school communities



There are **nine proposals** that you can comment on using [this online form](#)



The 9 proposals



Proposal 1 – Creating eye care teams



During the current programme NHS England set up the eye care teams.



This was difficult and took a long time to do in the current programme



So NHS England **will not** do the same thing for all special schools in England.



NHS England suggests that new eye care teams need to show they have enough professionals to offer an in-school eye testing service.



The new contract will not say which professionals need to be in the eye care teams but it is important that a full service is offered.



New eye care teams will need to explain how they have the experts and experience to carry out in-school eye testing services at special schools.



Proposal 2 - Equipment



Some of the equipment needed for the current programme was part funded by NHS England.



Some special schools said they found it difficult to store the equipment.



Other eye testing services such as those carried out at home do not need to provide certain equipment.



In future the eye care teams should have the equipment they need to carry out the eye testing.



Eye care teams thought the list of equipment in the current programme was too detailed.



So the new contract will say the eye care team only need equipment to make sure their eye tests follow a legal and clinical standard.



Proposal 3 - Professional requirements and training



In the current programme eye care teams had to:



- complete online training about communicating with children with learning disabilities and/or autism



- go to events at live eye testing clinics in special schools



Some eye care teams thought the training and events were too much or not helpful.



Eye care teams should be able to show they can work with and support children and young people at special schools.



Training is just one way to show they can do this. Professionals in the eye care team must:



- have the correct qualification (s)



- be registered and approved with a professional organisation



The qualification would show they can work with children and young people at special schools.



Professionals should:



- complete safeguarding training



- get a Disclosure and Barring Service or DBS check



The eye care team will not need to go on as many additional training courses.



The eye care team will need to show:



- they know how to support and work with children and young people at special schools



- they have completed Oliver McGowan training in learning disability and autism



Parent or carer consent for eye testing and selecting glasses



Proposal 4 - Consent for eye testing



A recent safeguarding review said the views and rights of children and the parent's voice are equally important.



So any new eye testing programmes should fully include the views of children and young people and their parent or carer.



In the **new** in-school eye testing programme it is important that children and young people, and their parent or carers can choose to have eye testing or not.

There is a risk that:



- **all** the needs of the child or young person are **not** understood



- important information about other eye care treatment is not shared or recorded



This will mean that it is important for eye care teams to get consent from parents or carers.



Parents on the current programme said they did not think they were included in their child's eye care or in selecting their glasses.



NHS England understands that parents or carers can make sure children get the best support during the in-school eye testing.



So it is important to:

- get parent or carer consent
- invite parents or carers to eye testing appointments





Inviting parents or carers can also make sure the child or young person's views are heard.



This will make sure everyone better understands the child or young person's eye health and their life.



This information will also be included in the report about the eye test.



Eye care teams and schools should work with parents to understand their child's needs.



The new in-school eye testing programme should include planning for the parents or carers to take part in the eye test.



The new service contract will include:



- parent or carer consent



- inviting parents or carers to eye test appointments



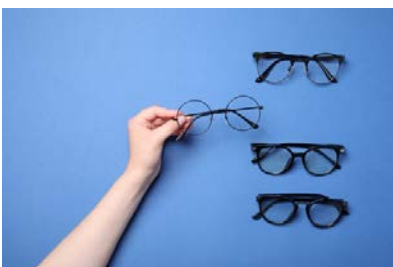
Proposal 5 - Selecting frames



The current programme includes a selection of frames from the eye care team working at the special school.



There is more choice of frames at High Street opticians.



So the child and young person and their parents or carers will get a smaller choice of frames at the special school.



Not all frames are suitable for all prescriptions so some children's choices may be limited at the special school.



Feedback from the current programme suggests that some parents and children did not think they had a good choice of frames.



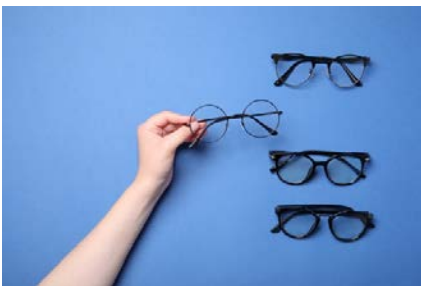
There is a need to choose certain frames and get the glasses that meets a child or young person's needs.



Eye care teams should offer a number of frames at different prices to match the needs of children and young people and their parent or carer.



Parents or carers should be invited to appointments where frames are selected and they get the right advice and information.



NHS England know that eye care teams will not be able to offer the same choice as High Street opticians.



If a child or young person and their parent or carer cannot choose a frame from the selection



they should be offered an **NHS Optical Voucher** where they can select frames at a High Street optician.



Proposal 6 - Working with the school community



For a successful in-school eye testing programme it is important that the following work closely together:



- eye care teams
- school staff
- local community



Then the service will run well and work well with children, young people and their parents or carers.



The current programme suggested there should be **familiarisation days** with the eyecare team and special school staff.



The **familiarisation days** would look at how the in-school eye testing clinics are planned and run at special schools.



The **familiarisation days** will **not** be included in the new in-school eye testing service though they were supported in the current programme.



The eye care team will decide on the best way to work with special schools.



It will be an important part of the new contract that eye care teams work closely with special schools to plan new in-school eye testing clinics.



Eye care teams will need to explain how they support special schools and the needs of the local community.



Proposal 7

Avoiding over treatment



The current programme did not check if children or young people needed an eye test or if they recently had an eye test.



High Street opticians always check if someone has had an eye test in the last 12 months.



There is a standard for how often eye testing should take place:



A child or young person who is under 16 years old:

should have an eye test **every twelve months.**



A child who is under 7 years old and has a vision disorder:

should have an eye test **every six months .**



A child or young person who is between **7 years old** and under **16** and **has a vision disorder** or **is becoming very short sighted:**

should have an eye test **every 6 months.**



A young person or adult who is **16 years and over** and **under 70 years:**

should have an eye test **every 2 years.**



Adults who are 70 years old and over:

should have an eye test **every 12 months.**



Adults who are 40 years and over with serious eye health problems:

should have an eye test **every 12 months.**



Patients with Diabetes:

should have an eye test **every 12 months.**



When a child or young person has a new eye test earlier than the suggested time periods in this section the optometrist must record why the test was carried out.



During the current programme some children had eye tests at hospital **and** a special school.



This is **not a good use** of resources and it could lead to:



- the child or young person getting worried



- parents cancelling eye health appointments at hospital



In the current programme some children and young people had eye tests earlier than they needed to.



So they got new frames when they did not have a new prescription.



The new in-school eye testing service could mean some children do not need eye health appointments at hospital.



This happened for some children and young people in the current programme.



Over-treatment should stop when more checks are done to see if the child or young person has had an eye test somewhere else.



We are looking into the best way to move children safely from hospital care to services at special schools.



Proposal 8 - Cost of frames and part payment by parents or carer



The current programme offered two frames to children and young people which were paid for by NHS England.



Forty-one per cent of all parents said their children received two new frames.



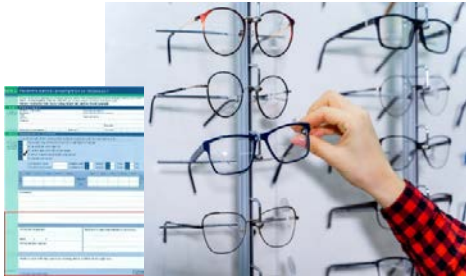
Since **April 2023**, the current programme gave the same help towards the cost of frames and lenses as **NHS optical vouchers**.



In other settings, children under 16 years old can get **NHS optical vouchers** if they need glasses after an eye test.



The value of the vouchers depends on the type of lenses that the child or young person needs.



All eye care teams should offer frames and lenses that are same or less than the value of the voucher.



Children and young people and their parents or carers could choose frames that cost more than the voucher.



Then the parents or carers would be asked to pay the rest.



This means the new in-school eye testing service would be similar to eye testing that is available to **all children**.



The service would include repairs and replacing lost glasses.



Second pair of glasses can be arranged by the eye care team but only if the child or young person needs them.



For children and young people over 16, the eye care team will say if they can have a repair, replacement or a second pair of glasses.



This is the same in an in-school eye testing service or on the High Street.



NHS England understand that some children and young people and their parents or carers may worry about getting a second pair of glasses.



Support for patients, parents and special schools



Proposal 9 - An eye health outcome report



The current programme said an eye health report should be included to help make changes at home and in the special school.



This could include reasonable adjustments such as:

- changes to seating
- changes to lighting



The eye health report will be included in the new eye testing service.



Do you think the eye health report should be included in the child's Education Health and Care Plan?



NHS England would like your feedback on:



- making this service better for clinicians, patients and parents or carers



- how any of the **nine proposals** could be better



Please give us your feedback on the changes
[by completing this online form](#)



or email your comments to:
england.specialschoolseyecareservice@nhs.net



The last day to give feedback is
Monday 16 October 2023



before **5pm.**