



PRESS RELEASE

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THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN MISSING OUT ON VISION SCREENING
College of Optometrists' investigation uncovers screening 'postcode lottery'

Fewer than a third of local authorities (30%) across England are providing vision screening for children, despite national recommendations¹ that all 4 to 5 year olds should be checked.

Following a series of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests, the College of Optometrists found that many primary school children are missing out on vision screening because their local authority has not put in place measures for the checks to be carried out.

The responsibility for vision screening, which aims to ensure that potential eye development problems are detected and treated as early as possible, should sit with local authorities. However, the College's investigation revealed that parents are faced with a confusing picture with many county councils (40%) admitting they did not provide vision screening for children in their local area.

With thousands of children across the country potentially missing out on an important check for vision defects, the College of Optometrists is urging parents and carers to be aware of the signs their child may have a vision problem and when to take them to their local optometrist.

Dr Susan Blakeney FCOptom, Clinical Adviser to the College of Optometrists says: "It's clear that the nationally recommended childhood vision screening programme in schools is somewhat of a postcode lottery. Our investigation serves to highlight how important it is for parents to make sure they're thinking about their child's sight from an early age - we really want to encourage parents to be more aware of the signs and symptoms to look out for that may indicate a problem.

"An eye examination is a simple process and doesn't take long but it could have a significant impact on your child's vision. The earlier any problems are picked up, the better they can be treated. Untreated vision problems may manifest themselves as problems with learning; it's hard to read well if you can't see properly! Most children will be fine, but if you have specific concerns or there's a family history of eye problems, such as needing strong glasses in childhood or having a squint or a lazy eye, then visit your local optometrist for a check-up."

¹ *The UK National Screening Committee*



Signs to look out for in your child that may signify a problem:

- Rubbing the eyes a lot (except when tired, which is normal)
- Excessively watery eyes
- Sitting very close to the TV or holding books or objects close to the face
- Being clumsy and having poor hand/eye coordination
- Screwing the eyes up or closing one eye when reading or watching TV
- Complaining about blurred or double vision or having unexplained headaches
- Avoiding reading, writing or drawing
- Closing one eye when going out in bright sunshine.

Click [here](#) to see our child eye health infographic which explains key stages in children’s eye development.

A video has been created for children showing what is involved in an eye examination – click [here](#).

For more information on the importance of looking after your eyes at all stages of life please visit: www.lookafteryoureyes.org

ENDS

For more information or an interview with one of our spokespeople please contact the press office on **020 7478 7841** or email **collegeofoptometrists@grayling.com**

Notes to editors:

The results of the FoI responses:

Issued to all local authorities in England between 27 April and 16 June 2015.

Local Authorities (LAs)	LAs that said they provide screening	LAs that said they do not provide screening	LAs that have not responded by 1st July	LAs that have indicated they plan to respond but not yet provided information
County Councils - 27	55%	40%	0	3%
Unitary Authorities - 55	27%	41%	27%	3%
London Boroughs - 32	18%	37%	37%	6%
Metropolitan Councils - 36	25%	38%	36%	0
	30% (45 local authorities)	40% (60 local authorities)	26% (40 local authorities)	3% (5 local authorities)

About child vision screening: The UK National Screening Committee recommends a systematic population screening programme for vision defects in children. Local authorities in England are



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responsible for ensuring the vision screening programme is delivered for children age 4 to 5. This normally takes place in schools.

About the College of Optometrists: The College of Optometrists is the professional, scientific and examining body for optometry in the UK, working for the public benefit. Supporting its members in all aspects of professional development, the College provides pre-registration training and assessment, continuous professional development opportunities, and advice and guidance on professional conduct and standards, enabling members to serve their patients well and contribute to the wellbeing of local communities.

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