

Oxford University Hospitals **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Department of Optometry

A guide to Children and Young People's Low Vision Services in Oxfordshire

Information for parents and carers



What is Low Vision?

Low vision is when your child's ability to see is still poor even when using both eyes and when wearing their appropriate glasses. It usually causes some difficulties in daily life, such as when reading or trying to copy from the whiteboard at school.

If you think that your child has an eye problem you should firstly contact your community Optometrist or GP. If your community Optometrist or GP cannot fully correct or explain the reason for your child's reduction in vision they will refer your child to be seen at the Eye Hospital.

There are a number of eye conditions that can result in low vision. Whilst treatment is available for some eye conditions, it is not always possible to restore perfect vision. It is important that your child is seen by an Ophthalmologist (eye doctor) to make a diagnosis (confirm why their vision is reduced).

There are a vast number of low vision services available in Oxfordshire for children and young people. This leaflet outlines the roles of the main services available.

Health Services

There are a number of health professionals in Oxfordshire with whom your child may have contact. The list below explains their main roles. They all work very closely with one another to provide the best care for your child.

Ophthalmologist: This is an eye doctor who is usually based at the Eye Hospital. They diagnose eye conditions and carry out any appropriate treatments or eye surgery. If your child's eye condition is part of a syndrome (e.g. if they have complex needs), they will make onward referrals to the appropriate medical services.

Hospital Optometrist: Here in Oxford the Optometrists based in the Hospital run a specialist Low Vision Assessment Clinic for children. They perform eye examinations, prescribe glasses, tints and magnifiers where appropriate. They also advise on how your child can maximise their vision and liaise with all other relevant health care professionals involved in the care of your child.

Orthoptist: They are based in hospitals or community clinics. They assess vision and diagnose and manage eye movement disorders in adults and children. Some Orthoptists have a more specialist role in assessing and advising children with vision impairment.

Dispensing Optician: They can be based in a high street practice or in the Hospital. They assist in the selection and fitting of glasses.

Community Optometrist: They are based in high street practices. They perform eye examinations and may have initiated the referral to the Eye Hospital.

Low Vision Assessment Clinic

This clinic is run by the Optometry Department at the Oxford Eye Hospital. The aim of the clinic is to explore what your child can see, to discuss the difficulties that may be caused by their reduced vision, and to offer practical solutions where possible.

We aim to provide your child with the necessary optical aids to perform everyday tasks. For example, this may be a new pair of glasses and/or a magnifier to help with reading.

The Optometrist will also give you and your child advice and information to make the best of the sight that they have. This may be advice on lighting to use when carrying out tasks, colour contrast and font size when reading or writing. They will also give you written information about your child's eye condition.

The clinic is part of a multidisciplinary low vision service. This is a group of medical staff who specialise in caring for children with sight problems. We work closely with all those involved in caring for your child, such as their community paediatrician (GP). If we feel that your child would benefit from being referred to other professionals, we will discuss this with you.

The length of the appointment varies from child to child and can be tailored to suit your child's needs. A typical assessment (which includes a glasses check) takes about one hour. Follow-up appointments take about half an hour. How often your child will need a follow-up appointment will be discussed at the end of each visit.

This can always be changed if any new concerns come to light.

Contact details

A referral to the Low Vision Assessment Clinic should be made by a health professional (Ophthalmologist, GP or Paediatrician). If you would like to know more about the Clinic please contact:

Optometry Department Secretary

Telephone: 01865 234 740

Support Orthoptist

To learn that your child has vision impairment can be an emotional and stressful time for families. If you would like to, the Support Orthoptist can arrange to meet with you and your family at this uncertain time to answer any questions and concerns you may have. They can also discuss the following:

- what the diagnosis means and what effects it might have
- what vision impairment may mean for your child and for you
- the support available for your child and family, and how to access it
- advice on making the best of your child's use of vision
- tips to minimise the effects of vision impairment on your child's general development.

Any health service professional can put you in touch with the Support Orthoptist.

Contact details

Specialist Orthoptist for children with vision impairment:

Oxford Eye Hospital

Telephone: 01865 234 742

Genetic Counselling

Sometimes, but not always, conditions that cause low vision are hereditary (run in families) and/or have a clear genetic cause. Having a genetic condition in the family can raise questions and have implications, not only for you, but for others in the family.

At the Oxford Eye Hospital we have a specialist Ophthalmic Genetics Clinic. This is supported by an Ophthalmic Genetic Counsellor (nurse or other professional with expertise in genetics). If it is believed that your child's vision difficulties may be caused by a genetic condition we will refer you to the Ophthalmic Genetics Clinic. These clinics are aimed at addressing your 'genetic-related' questions.

How might genetic counselling help my child and my family?

The doctors and Genetic Counsellor can help in several ways:

- making or confirming a diagnosis
- providing information about the eye condition
- explaining what genetic tests might be available
- talking about the support available to both your child and your family, and ways of coping with the condition
- discussing the risk (if there is any), that you or another member of your family may be affected by the condition in the future
- discussing the risk, if any, that your other children may inherit the condition.

If you have any concerns or questions about the genetics

of your child's condition please discuss these initially with their Ophthalmologist or GP. If appropriate, they can make a referral to the Ophthalmic Genetics Clinic.

Special Educational Needs Support Services (SENSS) – Visual Impairment Team

The Oxfordshire County Council employs teachers with an additional qualification in vision impairment. They offer advice and support to parents, schools and other educational settings. The service works with children and young people from birth to post-16. The teachers will provide:

- an assessment of your child's needs
- home support in the early years
- advice and strategies for your child's nursery, pre-school and school to help support your child with their learning and access to the curriculum
- techniques to help your child feel confident and promote social inclusion
- adaptation of learning materials e.g. large print books for schools
- support for learning keyboard skills and Braille
- help with information and communications technology (ICT).

The Local Offer gives children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities, and their families, information about what support services the local authority think will be available in their local area. For more information please visit:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/346281/The_local_offer_for_SEND_support.pdf

For information about the Local Offer in Oxfordshire please visit: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/special-educational-needs-and-disability-local-offer

To contact SENSS:

The Wheatley Centre

Littleworth Road, Wheatley Oxon OX33 1PH

Telephone: 01865 456 711

Fax: 01865 456 728

Visual Impairment Team (Social and Community Services)

Rehabilitation services are provided by the Visual Impairment Team, which is part of Social and Community Services, Oxfordshire County Council. They assess people of all ages who have sight loss and cover two key areas; these being:

Independent living skills: personal care, cooking, organising, lighting.

Mobility: covering current levels of mobility (ability to get around) and training programmes for using symbol canes, guide canes, and long canes. They will also cover road safety and route learning.

They also offer advice on benefits and services available to children with a vision impairment. Children can be seen at home, school or at the Visual Impairment Team offices.

Referrals to this service can be in the form of a letter from your child's GP, a "Low Vision Leaflet" (LVL) available from high street Optometrists, or a Referral of Visual Impairment (RVI)/Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) from Hospitals. Alternatively you can contact them directly.

Contact details:

The Visual Impairment Team (Social & Community Services)
Oxfordshire County Council

Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JD

Telephone: 01865 894 935

e-mail: visual.impairment@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Library services

Your local library service will be able to offer your child a number of alternative 'reading' options. They stock traditional large print books, books-on-tape (which, for children, are often accompanied by the book in the same pack) and books on CD. They also have some giant print books for children and offer free loans of audio-visual items and free book requests for those registered severely sight impaired.

The Dolphin 'Supernova' speech and enlargement software is available on all public library computers, including those in the children's section of the larger libraries. This software makes it easier to access the Internet or type a piece of work using Microsoft Word.

The library service can give information on Calibre Library for the Blind and Visually Impaired. This service

offers many children's books in MP3 format or on memory sticks. The NLB (National Library for the Blind) also have thousands of books for children in all formats. Contact the RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) for more information.

The Oxfordshire Association for the Blind

The Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (OAB) is also available to visually impaired children and their families as a source of advice and information about living with a sight impairment. Their resource centre has a variety of types of equipment which children and young people may find useful to help them to be as active and independent as possible. They understand that the challenges of poor vision can be emotionally difficult for children and their families and are keen to offer support and guidance.

Contact details:

Oxfordshire Association for the Blind
Bradbury Lodge
Gordon Woodward Way
Oxford, OX1 4XL

Telephone: 01865 725 595

e-mail: information@oxeyes.org.uk

Website: www.oxeyes.org.uk

LOOK Oxfordshire

Look Oxfordshire is an Oxfordshire based Support Group for parents, families and professionals who have or work with children with a vision impairment. It is run by parents.

LOOK organise regular meetings in a relaxed and informal environment to link parents together. These meetings are an opportunity to share experiences, concerns and information. There are also resources available for the children.

LOOK organise fun and stimulating activities for children with a vision impairment and their siblings during the school holidays. These include trips out, to places such as Thames Valley Adventure Playground, Thomley Hall, museums, theatres, local farms and a wide variety of other sensory based activities.

Contact details:

Please contact the Oxfordshire Association for the Blind for further details.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

This leaflet has been produced by the Paediatric Subgroup of the Oxfordshire Vision Strategy Committee.

August 2016

Review: August 2019

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

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www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

