

CALDER HOUSE SCHOOL

Thickwood Lane, Colerne, Near Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN14 8BN

Eye Sight & Hearing Tests: Advice for Parents

WHY TEST?

I have many mantras, one being that subskills remediation at Calder House follows the same 'ABC' code adopted by the Metropolitan Police, when training future detectives:

A = Assume Nothing

B = Believe Nothing

C = Check EVERYTHING!

Since subskill remediation operates according to a core belief in confronting a pupil's difficulties at the root cause – and in an holistic way (as our children's learning profiles are frequently characterised by *co-occurring difficulties*) – it makes sense that we assume nothing and checking everything. We believe that two important components of such a check should include having our learners' eyes and hears tested.

EYES

Specialists advise that we all have our eyes tested once a year. A child may have their first eye test from the age of 3.5 years onward.

Because eye tests are a useful tool for checking health in general, we suggest that you ask your optometrist for as full an eye examination as possible. The nature of eye tests vary widely. Because of this, we thought it useful that we detail some of the difficulties we observe as teachers, so that you might communicate these to your optometrist in order that s/he might tailor the examination accordingly.

Firstly, of course, decoding of text relies heavily upon good close-up vision. As such, a test for hyperopia (long sightedness) is the first priority. Equally, if a child struggles to see the Interactive White Board, then short-sightedness will also impact their learning.

Any eye examination, of course, tests for such difficulties.

However, we have also observed the significance of poor tracking upon the ability to read and follow text. When one or both eyes do not move smoothly, accurately, and quickly across a line or from one object to another. Additionally, this includes the inability to fixate (lock ones' eyes) onto a single target (like a word on a printed page). **If a child's eyes cannot properly "track" from word to word smoothly and seamlessly, reading, writing, and copying are difficult.** Technically, eye movement and tracking problems are referred to as 'oculomotor dysfunctions.' If you suspect that your child has difficulties with tracking (some indicators include: moving their head excessively when reading; skipping lines when reading; omitting words and transposing words when reading; losing their place when reading; requiring a finger or marker to keep place when reading) then you should mention this to your optometrist, as such difficulties can often be observed in the course of a general eye sight test.

Sometimes, we might observe vision difficulties during COGMED, and online computer program used to improve our learners' working memories. One of the games involve the child having to identify what I refer to as 'target shapes.' These are shapes that are briefly highlighted, and are then moved to some other place on the screen. Working memory aside, achievement in such games also assumes good vision, especially in terms of saccadic (rapid) and smooth pursuit eye-movements.

Oculomotor skills (skills requiring co-ordination of eye muscles) are, then, important to learning. Generally, such difficulties will be identified in the course of general eye tests. But, if you have concerns about the way in which your child's eyes scan across words, then you should bring those concerns to the attention of the optometrist, who might then suggest that you visit your GP. *Your GP, in turn, might refer you to an orthoptist.*



Of course, should we observe such visual difficulties, we will communicate these to parents immediately.

The same applies to the presence of squints (strabismus), where eyes do not move together. Again, this is usually observed before the child reaches school, as they usually develop before the age of 5. If you suspect, though, that your child suffers from strabismus, you should take your child to your GP, who may consider it prudent to refer you onward to see an orthoptist.

It is essential that, where you have such concern, or if there has been a history of such difficulties, you communicate this history to us.

EARS

The NHS advises that hearing tests are carried out soon after birth and that these help identify most babies with significant hearing loss.

Without routine hearing tests, there's a chance that a hearing problem could go undiagnosed for many months or even years. It's important to identify hearing problems as early as possible because they can affect your child's speech and language development, social skills and education.

Your child's hearing would have been checked **within a few weeks of birth** – this is known as newborn hearing screening and it's often carried out before you leave hospital after giving birth. This is routine for all children and even those having a home birth will be invited to come to hospital to have this.

Your child's hearing can also be checked at any other time if you have any concerns. In older children, signs of a possible hearing problem can include:

- inattentiveness or poor concentration;
- not responding when their name is called;
- talking loudly and listening to the television at a high volume;
- difficulty pinpointing where a sound is coming from;
- mispronouncing words.

If you observe any of the above, then you might speak with your GP, or seek a free hearing test through any of the high street stores, such as *Specsavers* or *Boots*.

WE ask that – before September, if your child has not had a hearing test within a year – you have a general hearing test at one of these outlets.

Again, please communicate any findings of hearing tests to Calder House.

Ian Perks
Director of Studies

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