

## Out of sight, out of mind: parents and carers understanding of sight tests for school aged children

Although **routine sight tests** are offered to newborn babies and young children at development checks, children are only tested in school when they first start, aged 4/5 years. **What happens then?** We heard that parents/carers may only take their children for eye tests if they are prompted by school and believe that the costs of sight test and glasses may be prohibitive.

### Who did we speak to?



**87** Surrey parents/carers responded to our survey or spoke to us at our community engagement events which took place in areas classified as deprived in some way<sup>1</sup> in Guildford & Waverley, Farnham and Reigate & Banstead.



### Key findings

#### Those who have taken their child/ren for sight tests:

**Only half reported that they took their child/ren for a sight test annually; 1 out of 5 said that they didn't visit regularly.**

- Just **over a half** of parents/carers started taking their children for sight tests at the age of 4 or 5 when they first started school; from the age of 10 onwards, almost no parents/carers we spoke started to take their child/ren for sight tests.
- The main reason (**three quarters**) residents took their child/ren for sight tests was because they **wanted to check their child/ren's vision** having been prompted to do so by school or a health care professional, because of a family history of impaired vision or because their child/ren had reported signs that suggested difficulties with their vision, such as headaches.
- **9 out of 10** of residents said that they **were very satisfied or satisfied** with their access and experience of sight tests for their child/ren. However, experiences were mixed, particularly for neurodivergent children, with some residents describing excellent service, adapting to the child's needs, and other reporting abruptness and impatience.

"This experience is never easy. I have 3 children who all have special educational needs and often the staff have very little understanding of their autism and other conditions. Every time we attend, I have to request a quiet room, end of day appointment and waiting times to be minimum." **Mum of 3, Guildford resident**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/census-2021/census-2021-household-deprivation/>

### Those who haven't taken their child/ren for sight tests:

- A third of parents/carers said that they don't see the need to get their child/ren's sight tested; reasons for this included concern that the special needs of their child could not be met at high street opticians such as autism or non-verbal children, that school would prompt them if they needed to take their child/ren or that they had not thought about it.

- **"I thought this was done in school". Mum of 7 year old, Reigate & Banstead**
- **"I have a severely autistic child and I am not sure he'd even go inside the shop". Mum of 10 year old, Runnymede**

- A half gave other reasons including problems of access:

- **"I tried Boots but they said if she can't read, it's not possible to do the test". Mum of 5 year old, Woking**
- **The availability of child specific eye tests is limited so I have been unable to make an appointment". Mum of 5 year old, Reigate & Banstead**

- Three quarters of parents/carers said they would take their child/ren for a sight test if they were prompted by school or noticed clues at home such as squinting.

### Awareness of entitlements and tests

Just over a half of respondents said that they did not know the **criteria** for free sight tests and optical vouchers for children; when we told them, just over a half said knowing the criteria would make a difference to them taking their child/ren for sight tests.

**"From a financial perspective, that makes a huge difference." Mum of a 6 year old, Reigate & Banstead resident**

Although three quarters of respondents thought they knew **what the eye test is designed to identify**; when we clarified with them, half said that knowing this information would make a difference to them taking their children for an eye test.

**"It's good to know as they can catch sight impairment early and help children in the near future". Mum of 4 (aged 5 to 13), Guildford resident**

People in Surrey talked to us about waiting times and the impact of waiting, the cost burden of eye tests and the issue of "upselling" in our previous report:

[A strain on sight: waiting for NHS specialist eye care - Healthwatch Surrey](#)