



Working with Children and Young People with Visual Processing Difficulties in Buckinghamshire Local Area Position Statement January 2023

This position paper draws upon a review of the research evidence and represents the views of Education, Health and Social Care providers and commissioners within the Buckinghamshire Local Area. It is aimed at practitioners supporting children and young people who are experiencing difficulties in visual processing and its purpose is to improve consistency of approach amongst professionals and reduce the uncertainty for families. This position paper consists of:

1. Buckinghamshire Local Area's position in relation to the assessment of visual processing disorders
2. A description of the multi-agency approach aimed at identifying and supporting children and young people who are experiencing visual processing difficulties.

What is visual processing?

It is the brain's ability to process and interpret what the eyes see. It includes how the eyes work together (binocular vision), tracking of the eyes whilst reading, making fast eye movements, visual comfort, and the perceptual aspects of vision. Visual processing difficulties that affect reading can be identified in a child (over 7 years) or adult who either does not require glasses and has some or all the following difficulties or still has these difficulties below despite wearing their glasses.

- Frowning, scowling, or screwing eyes up with visual tasks
- Print jumbling or merging together
- Holding books too closely or too far away.
- Poor posture/ wriggling at desk
- Red eyes or lids
- Headaches, especially around the front of the head
- Rubbing eyes frequently
- Repeatedly confusing right / left directions
- Reversals when reading e.g., was/saw, on/no, b/d, p,q
- Losing place frequently when reading
- Repeatedly missing 'small' words
- Mistaking words with the same or similar beginnings or endings
- Confusing the same word in the same sentence
- Struggling to copy from the board
- Moving head excessively or forwards or backwards while looking at the page
- Seeing double
- Tilting of the head
- Blurry vision at any time
- Pain around the eyes
- Closing or covering one or both eyes in bright light or during visual tasks
- Excessive eye watering
- Skipping or re-reading words or letters
- Transposing letters when writing
- Uses finger as a marker when reading
- Getting confused by symbols such as + /-
- Failing to recognise the same word in the next sentence
- Struggling to remember sequences

[BIOS - British & Irish Orthoptic Society](#)

[Who is commissioned to provide visual processing assessment in Buckinghamshire?](#)

These services are agreed by the Local Area to be the providers of visual processing assessment and advice in Buckinghamshire.

Visual Processing Difficulties (VPD) Clinic, Orthoptic Department, [Ophthalmology](#) Stoke Mandeville Hospital and Wycombe Hospital (Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust)

In line with the British & Irish Orthoptic Society (BIOS) description, the purpose of the service is to identify and correct visual difficulties that will in some way contribute to a child having a reading or specific learning difficulty.

The clinic offers an Orthoptic assessment to assess if the eyes work well together (Binocular Vision) & look at the focusing mechanism (Accommodative ability) of the eyes. Depending on the outcome of this a follow up appointment will be offered in the VPD clinic to assess if the child has Visual stress / discomfort and / or visual perception difficulties.

It is recommended that the child is seen by a local Optometrist before they attend their Orthoptic assessment.

The Orthoptist will:

- Determine visual problems relating to reading and writing skills
- Manage the visual processing difficulties in a child or young person-centred way.
- Offer support to parents and teachers
- Offer advice and guidance to schools, Colleges, and Universities.

[Children's Occupational Therapy Service](#) – (Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust)

The purpose of the service is to help children and young people who have problems learning, developing, socialising, and playing, or have a physical and/or learning disability to get the most from their lives and achieve their potential. The service works with children and families, health, education, and social care colleagues to support children who struggle with daily activities including:

- learning to explore the world
- participating in nursery or school
- feeding themselves independently
- dressing themselves independently
- accessing suitable toileting/bathing facilities
- playing with toys and games.

If identified as an area for concern, Occupational Therapists use standardized assessments to assess for visual perception difficulties that may impact on a child's ability to perform daily activities. Management of Visual perceptual difficulties may include compensatory strategies and activities to develop the identified areas of weakness.

The Occupational Therapy service run a free training session [Supporting children with Visual Perceptual Difficulties](#). There is no need to book these sessions.

What is Behavioural Optometry?

Standard optometry looks at **what letters you can see on a chart**, whereas behavioural optometry takes things a step further and looks at **the way your brain interprets what you are seeing**. It is a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates the physical, neurological, and developmental aspects of vision and can therefore treat difficulties that standard optometry cannot. ([British Association Of Behavioural Optometrists BABO](#))

[The College of Optometrists](#) is the professional body for optometry. [The General Optical Council](#) (GOC) is the regulatory body for optical professions in the UK.

The College of Optometry have advised that Behavioural Optometry is not regulated, is not part of the core training and is not a protected title under the GOC. There is no single recognised provider of training or standardised training. Behavioural Optometry is considered by the College of Optometrists as an alternative therapy, which some people may find benefit from. The College commissioned a critical evaluation of the evidence supporting the practice of behavioural vision therapy in 2009. The evaluation was published in the peer reviewed journal and concluded that there is a paucity of high-quality evidence to support behavioural optometry and as such the College do not support its practice.

Evidence reviewed

[A critical evaluation of the evidence supporting the practice of behavioural vision therapy](#) - Barrett - 2009

[Learning disabilities, dyslexia, and vision](#) - Handler SM, Fierson WM, 2011

[American Association of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus](https://aapos.org/glossary/vision-therapy)<https://aapos.org/glossary/vision-therapy>
– Vision Therapy Dec 2020

[University of Reading Research](#) – Focus on Children’s vision

[The official joint policy statement \(2009\) for learning disabilities, dyslexia, and vision](#) of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, and the American Academy of Ophthalmology