



# Children in Focus 2019: A change in sight

**SEE ABILITY**  
Extraordinary every day

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Front cover photo:

*We gave Eli glasses that specially fit for comfort with his wheelchair headrest and for his head movement.*

## Executive Summary

In 2013 we began our work to bring early eye care through sight testing, dispensing of glasses and jargon free reporting into **11 special schools**, knowing that children with a learning disability are **28 times more likely** to have a serious sight problem than other children.

This report looks back on the past six years of work by our clinical team, delivering over **3500 sight tests, dispensing over 1700 pairs of glasses and supporting nearly 1500 children with their eye care needs.**

We have found that **nearly half of children have a problem with their vision, and nearly one third need glasses.** Many of these vision problems are correctable and treatable, but even where that is not possible if we know what a child can see, strategies can be built in that can help them go forward in life.

We celebrate the fact that NHS England has used this evidence and is now **committed to introduce a similar programme of eye care across all of England's special schools, reaching over 120,000 children.** We hope to see this begin from April 2020.

This will address a whole host of unmet need, as we know from our research that **only 1 in 10 children we have seen have a history of going to a community optician**, and 44% had never had any eye care before. The remainder of children are attending busy hospital outpatient clinics for often routine eye care.

We also celebrate how the research has helped further our understanding of the eye care of children with learning disabilities. We are now the **biggest global study actively reporting on the needs of these children**, publishing in an international journal for the first time in 2019. Our work has been showcased at **51 conferences and events, featured in 12 publications, and we have trained nearly 800 teaching professionals on eyes and vision.**

One of the key messages from this work is the importance of supporting children with glasses so they can make the most of their vision in school.

Parents are almost **unanimous in their support** for a service in special school and welcome their children getting their glasses there, while teachers also testify to how their pupils have become more engaged in class because they are able to see better since getting their glasses. Excitingly our work has led to further research which has actually measured this for the first time too.

## Introduction – Lisa Hopkins, Chief Executive

SeeAbility is a charity that has a long and proud history, with beginnings in 1799, supporting those with learning disabilities, autism, and sight loss to be included in society, through a variety of care, support and therapeutic specialist services.

In the last decade our attention has turned to addressing one of the largest unaddressed disabilities in the world today, namely poor vision - amongst one of the highest populations at risk, people with learning disabilities. Of the 1.5 million people with learning disabilities in the UK we know one in ten adults will have a serious sight problem and many hundreds of thousands more will need glasses.

In 2013, we began our Children in Focus programme in special schools and asked how can we transform children's lives by bringing early and accessible eye care and glasses to their school?

Six years on, four annual reports later, and now the biggest global study of the eye care needs of these children, we believe we have answered this question comprehensively. So much so that NHS England has committed to make a special schools eye care programme a reality from 2020 onwards.

In the following pages we highlight key achievements, what we have learnt, and follow the progress made by some of the children we have supported through the years.

We have found some serious cases of potentially blinding sight conditions - but we have also found that a simple, modest, 700 year old invention - called glasses - can transform children's lives.



It makes me incredibly proud that as we come to celebrate our 220th anniversary year, we are now at the point where well over 120,000 children with learning disabilities will get the eye care they need in the future. Launching this report on World Sight Day 2019 makes this doubly special.

This report is a tribute and thanks to all the pupils, their parents and families, head teachers, and staff in the special schools we have been working with; the many different funders who made the project possible; and the eye care professionals and their organisations and the policymakers who have supported the case for this model of care. You have helped change things for generations to come.

## How it works

SeeAbility uses a multidisciplinary service model involving experienced optometrists, orthoptists and dispensing opticians managed by our optometry practice manager and administrator.

The tests undertaken, and the equipment used can be found in our earlier reports, at [www.seeability.org](http://www.seeability.org). All that is needed is small dedicated space at school capable of being blacked out for some of the tests.

Parents/carers are always given the option to attend on the day of testing and a choice of how they want their child's spectacles dispensed (in school, or a voucher/prescription to take elsewhere). If the SeeAbility team identify concerns about a child's vision or eye health, appropriate referrals are made to the GP or hospital eye clinic.

During the school year SeeAbility also offers staff training for all schools on the principles of eye care and vision for children with learning disabilities.

Since the beginning in 2013 to the end of summer 2019, in 11 special schools, we have delivered:

- Over 3500 sight tests
- Dispensed over 1700 glasses
- Seen nearly 1500 children
- Trained nearly 800 teachers



**1705**  
glasses  
dispensed



**770**  
teaching staff  
trained on eyes  
and vision

**3552**  
sight tests  
delivered in  
special schools



**1482**  
children seen in  
**11**  
special schools



## The benefits of bringing eye care into special schools

- ✓ **A calm and familiar setting relieves stress and anxiety for the children meaning they are more likely to comply with a sight test and get used to eye care, taking this forward into adult life.**
- ✓ **Teaching staff know the children and can inform the eye care team what works best for the child or what might be potential triggers for distress.**
- ✓ **Flexibility to reschedule or carry out different elements of the tests on different days/ times, and to invite parents to attend.**
- ✓ **Children getting glasses in school and not being without them for long if they get broken or in need of replacement.**
- ✓ **Immediate feedback and jargon free reporting, making it easy to understand for parents and teachers what a child can see which can then be used to feed into a child's education, health and care plans.**
- ✓ **Children don't have to be out of school to attend eye care appointments at clinics or optical practices, with the school eye care team assessing how the child functionally uses their vision in their own environment.**



Kush at his sight test with Rai, SeeAbility's optometrist

## Why eyes and vision?

Visual impairment and blindness is relatively rare in the general population of children, but children with learning disabilities are 28 times more likely to have a serious sight problem based on current research.

Globally the World Health Organisation places the main cause of avoidable visual impairment as 'uncorrected refractive error' where the eye cannot clearly focus due to short or long-sightedness or astigmatism (irregular shape of the lens or outermost layer of the eye) but glasses to correct are not being worn. Refractive error is common in children with learning disabilities who often need high prescriptions. Other sight problems include:

- *Amblyopia (reduced vision, sometimes called 'lazy eye')*
- *Strabismus (also known as squint/eye turn)*
- *Accommodative anomalies (the eye's ability to shift focus)*
- *Cerebral Visual Impairment (abnormalities with vision processing in the brain) or visual field loss due to brain damage.*
- *Cataracts (clouding of the lens in the eye).*
- *Problems with eye movements such as nystagmus (involuntary eye movements) or poor eye movement control*
- *Keratoconus (changes to shape of the eye's outermost layer).*
- *Developmental abnormalities of the eye or optic nerve*
- *A risk of retinal detachment, due to self injurious behaviour.*

If a child has a sight problem, it is important that parents and school staff are aware of it and it is corrected or treated where possible. But even where that is not possible, if we know what a child can see, we can still build in strategies that can help them go forward in life. It's so easy for a child's learning disability or autism to be put as the reason for behaviours – overshadowing the simple fact that they just can't see clearly.



# 28x more likely

Children with a learning disability are 28 times more likely to have serious sight problems.

## Bushrah's story

Bushrah\* is a young girl with Down's Syndrome and Autism. She has a history of eye care in hospital and being discharged due to missing appointments.

When we first saw her, hospital had prescribed glasses to stop her eyes turning in (squint). Squint is fairly common in cases such as Bushrah's, where a child has a high prescription and the effort of trying to focus is too much for the visual system. But she was unhappy and rejecting her glasses.

This meant not only was everything blurred at all distances, but Bushrah was at risk of significant and permanent sight loss over time, as if the brain receives a poor signal from the eye turning in, that eye becomes a weak or 'lazy' eye, stunting its visual potential. And with only one eye being used, Bushrah would have lost the ability to also see binocularly, ie in 3D and have depth perception.

Bushrah had appointments with our optometrist and orthoptist to help give her good vision and control of her eye movements and monitor that all important squint, to help get her vision back on track. Because her prescription is so high and she had initially not liked her glasses, we lowered their strength slightly to help her get used to glasses gradually.

Our dispensing optician saw Bushrah in her classroom and playground, finding a pair of glasses frames that would be comfortable. We made a spare pair of glasses for Bushrah to avoid any setbacks if her glasses get lost or broken. This support has resulted in her now happily using her glasses all the time. This controls her squint and stimulates her vision to get stronger every day. Success!

(\*Bushrah's name has been changed)



*At a +5.00D prescription and with a squint Bushrah would have been having problems seeing her classroom but thanks to wearing her glasses things are much clearer*

## A high level of sight problems found

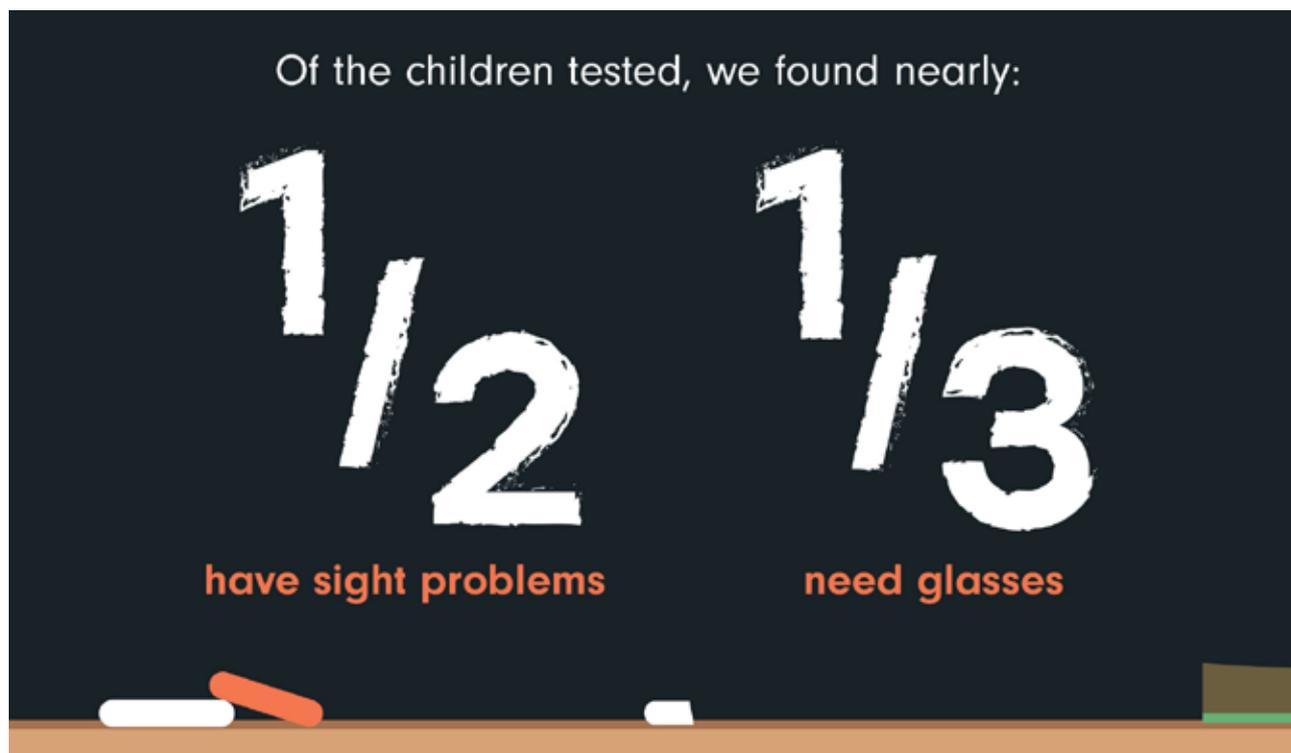
Across the special schools we work in we can confirm a high prevalence and vast range of sight problems, confirming what other UK and international studies in special schools have shown.

In 2019 we published our findings in the international science journal PLOS One, with our ongoing work now the biggest study of eye care needs of children with learning disabilities globally. More on this research can be found at [www.seeability.org/research](http://www.seeability.org/research).

The findings, taken from 949 pupil records found that:

- Nearly half of children (46.2%) had some form of vision problem
- Nearly one third (31.5%) of pupils needed glasses
- Around one quarter of pupils (24.9%) of whom we could get a measure for had such poor sight to be classed as having 'low vision' according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) criterion.

27% of the pupils had a vision problem that was previously unknown to school or parents.



## An unequal right to sight

Children in full-time education in England are entitled to a NHS sight test annually (or more often if clinically necessary).

However our investigations have found that, despite good work by many eye care professionals to support children with learning disabilities, there is no failsafe system to ensure all children in this high risk group receive regular eye examinations or wear the glasses they need, and few children access their right to a NHS sight test.

For most children who do get regular checks, they are in a hospital eye clinic due to the lack of a community based alternative. Other children, like Bushrah, are discharged from or lost to hospital eye clinic follow up and then cannot or do not access community based eye care.

In the special schools we have worked in we've found:

- Over 4 in 10 children have never had a sight test
- Only 1 in 10 have accessed a community sight test in the past
- 47% of children were going to hospital for eye care

Every child has the right to an  
NHS sight test, however:



Only 1 in 10 have accessed a community eye test in the past

Over 4 in 10 (44%) children have never had a sight test.

Hospital was the most frequently reported location for previous eye care (47%)

## Nathan's story

Nathan is a little boy who needs his glasses to focus clearly for his longsightedness (+3.00D) and to treat a squint. He had been seen at a hospital eye clinic and given glasses to help control this but he wasn't using them and had been discharged from the hospital when SeeAbility first saw him at his school. Nathan has got on better and better with the sight testing, and everyone now more clearly understands what Nathan can see .

Also being in school has really helped him get on with his glasses, which he was not keen on wearing at first. Because our dispensing opticians are in the school a lot it also means that Nathan can get his glasses repaired and replaced as they do get broken quite often.

This is important as Nathan is at the crucial age when he is being asked to do more and more near learning tasks, such as Picture Exchange Communication system and with an iPad. His visual potential is also developing quickly and so wearing his glasses will help strengthen his eyes and hopefully allow him to develop depth perception (3D vision).

Children like Nathan could easily end up lost in the system once discharged from hospital, with parents not knowing where to take their children locally for a sight test.



*Nathan is doing really well with his glasses.*

## What do parents say?

“Whenever we put our son's glasses on he smiles and does happy vocalising.”

We have undertaken a number of surveys with parents over the course of the project. 97% of parents agree that having an eye test in school is convenient for their child. Why is this? At least half of parents who responded said they had not tried to get an eye test before because they were worried it was not possible, but we also heard about past experiences being off-putting:

*“My child was always nervous about going to the hospital, especially as he usually had eye drops, which he didn't like at all. There was such a lot of waiting around in the hospital for us.”*

*“We knew he just wouldn't cope if an optician came towards him. It makes it worse if you have to physically restrain your child every time you take him for a sight test.”*

In our most recent survey no parent said they were unhappy with the service or would not recommend it to other parents. We had a 100% satisfaction rate from parents where their child has had glasses from us, with the vast majority saying that their child is wearing their glasses successfully and stating they now know more about their children's eyes and vision.

*“Whenever we put our son's glasses on he smiles and does happy vocalising. This was an indication his vision was better with glasses.”*



Isaac with mum Julliette

Julliette says: *“We struggled with visits to the hospital eye clinics. With hospital they put drops in his eyes, and if Isaac isn't having a good day you end up going back and forth to complete the tests. It was only when SeeAbility started coming to the school that we had the squint treated. By that point he was 9 years old. He now wears his glasses and it's really helped to have arches on the sides that help them stay in place. It would be fantastic for all children in special schools to have a spare pair of glasses as a right, this is so important. We have noticed Isaac is maturing better and his behaviour is better than before. He is sitting down and paying more attention in class too.”*

## Getting glasses in classes

Children with learning disabilities are much more likely to need glasses than the general population of children, and their prescriptions tend to be higher and more complex. Unlike the vast majority of the general childhood population, children with learning disabilities often need different pairs of glasses for different tasks or bifocal or varifocal glasses.

Without glasses many of the children we see would be classed as 'functionally visually impaired', with a huge impact for those children who may be non verbal, and rely on their eyes to communicate.

Under current legislation, only dispensing opticians or optometrists may supply and fit spectacles to children under 16. Our dispensing team source and provide specialist or flexible frames, adaptations, repairs, spare and replacement glasses.

Appointments will range from initial frame choice and fitting, then fitting once glasses have been made to their prescription, and for a child prescribed glasses for the first time or given a change of prescription, crucial follow ups to ensure they are successfully wearing their glasses and any concerns are addressed.

Being in school means we can provide proactive support and unscheduled checks for children, including repairs and adjustments in the classroom, without disrupting their school day. We ensure glasses are as comfortable as they can be and provide strategies, support and reassurance to assist children in getting used to wearing them. It is vital that everyone working with each child who needs glasses understands the negative effect that being without them has on their vision and support children in getting used to glasses.



SeeAbility clinic manager Noopur with pupil Alex

## Leon's story

“ Without you guys Leon and I would be lost, your service is amazing!!!! ”

Leon is a young man who has needed 17 dispenses and repairs over four years, as well as many other visits from our dispensing optician to help him get used to his glasses.

He has autism and is non-verbal. Before his sight test with SeeAbility mum Jennifer had found it hard to get his sight tested conventionally, resulting in an estimated prescription and glasses that were rarely used and often broken. No one realised how poor Leon's sight was without glasses.

In fact we found Leon is -5.00D meaning beyond 20cm everything is blurry. Without his glasses he would be functionally visually impaired. He is getting on beautifully with them and mum has noticed how he is calmer, more confident and more sociable than before.

The final word is with Jennifer, Leon's mum: *“Without you guys Leon and I would be lost, your service is amazing!!!!”*



Leon has really benefitted from our dispensing service

Since our service began only 6 parents have preferred a prescription or voucher, rather than getting their child's glasses dispensed in school. And because the need for glasses is so great we also know how valuable a spare pair of glasses is - something being actively considered in the new national NHS funded programme.

Children with learning disabilities have a high need for, and support with, glasses.

Our latest data shows:

Over  
**400**

children needed glasses



appointments on average with a dispensing optician a year



of children needed repairs or replacements within the year

## What do teachers say?

“ This makes such a difference to the children and young people ”

Bringing eye care into special schools often meets a previously unknown need that can really transform a child's life and education.

One of the key aspects of the service is sharing information with parents, teaching staff and Qualified Teachers of pupils with Visual Impairment (QTVIs) using SeeAbility's 'The results of your child's eye test' form. This information can then be used in the child's Education, Health and Care Plan.

Every year we ask teaching staff about their satisfaction with the service. Nearly 90 teaching staff answered our survey this year, and they were almost unanimous in being happy with the eye care the children have received, using the information they had got for the children they work with, and recommending the service to others.

Andrew Sanders (pictured below with pupil Gurvinder) is the head teacher at Moorcroft School, a school we have worked with since the start of our project.

*"This makes such a difference to the children and young people. You know our students so well, you are very patient, and you take your time. It really is life changing.*

*My highlight? I can think of one child in particular where in class she was quite passive and not very engaged. But the day after she got her glasses, staff came to me really, really excited. She was engaging in lessons, exploring and learning, and a few weeks ago I went to see her in class making smoothies with a food processor. This would have never happened before! It was as if a light had gone on in her life."*



Moorcroft head teacher Andrew Sanders with his pupil Gurvinder

## Nasir's story

“ We've seen fantastic outcomes in school from the programme ”

If Nasir is a familiar face to you, then you may recall him from SeeAbility's first film about our work in 2015. SeeAbility gave him his first sight test and glasses in his special school at age 7, and he had an obvious squint (eye turn).

Having Down's Syndrome comes with a high likelihood of need for glasses, often with a strong prescription, and as he has got older Nasir's prescription has changed. Now at age 11 he is wearing bifocals for school – something unimaginable when we first saw him. Bifocals help him see clearly both close up and at a distance through shifting his gaze.

Nick (pictured right) is Nasir's teacher. He says: *“With young Nas, he is so much more interactive in school now. He is getting used to the idea of looking up to see distance, looking down to focus. This is about giving him lots of activities that are close and then far so he can work out how to use the glasses. It helps that I'm a glasses wearer, I know how it impacts on my day if I don't have my glasses! We've seen fantastic outcomes in school from the programme.”*



Nasir in his new bifocals



## Informing practice through research

In 2019 we became the biggest global study actively reporting on the eye care needs of children with learning disabilities, publishing our findings in the international peer reviewed science journal PLOS One, a first for SeeAbility. This work was co-authored by Dr Maggie Woodhouse OBE who has been our Principal Investigator for this project.



The paper also considered if the UK's recommended tool of vision screening at school entry, ages 4-5 years, is suitable for children in special schools. Applying the usual test, which is not a full sight test but distance reading from a chart, we found only 1 child would pass either due to their poor vision or inability to comply with the test. In many cases this would mean a referral on to hospital eye clinics.

Public Health England, who are responsible for the resources for the screening programme, has already used this evidence and a sector led framework, based on the SeeAbility model, to recommend children attending special schools be offered a fuller sight testing pathway to support their vision in school rather than vision screening. In other words, a comprehensive eye examination, in-school dispensing of glasses and a jargon-free report for parents, teachers.

Excitingly, an accompanying piece of research in a Northern Ireland special school, led by Ulster University's Centre for Optometry and Vision Science Research, has used this framework to demonstrate the quantifiable benefits for children, not just from the positive impact on vision but from better classroom engagement. More information is available at [www.ulster.ac.uk/theseeproject](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/theseeproject).

As pointed out by the Ulster research team, and from our work, we know also that children do sometimes struggle to get used to their glasses and enhanced strategies are needed to encourage compliance with glasses wear.

In 2017 we undertook work with occupational therapists Whole Child Therapy to look at how we might address some of these issues, a key discovery being that helping children to keep moving and stimulating all their senses while their glasses are on can really help to get used their new visual world.

## Next steps for our research and policy work

In the future we would like to publish and undertake further research on how best to support children with SEND to wear their glasses, find partners to work with on the development of new technology and testing tools that are really engaging for children with SEND. We would also like to support research on how to better understand and diagnose cerebral visual impairment, which we diagnosed or suspected in 14.9% of the pupils we saw.

We also recognise that the information on what a child can see is vital for their Education, Health and Care Plan, and yet there is evidence that this information does not regularly feature in EHCPs. This is something that we would like to see addressed by the Department of Education.

To read more about SeeAbility's ambitious research strategy see [www.seeability.org/research](http://www.seeability.org/research).

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## Thank you Dr Maggie Woodhouse OBE



In the past six years Maggie has given her time to us for free, crunching our data, answering our questions and advising us on our service. She has won awards for her 40 years of research into the visual requirements of people with learning disabilities, establishing the Down's Syndrome Vision Research Unit at Cardiff University, and developing a number of vision tests as well as providing the evidence for a programme in Wales special schools.

Thank you Maggie for all your support!

## Informing practice through awareness

Since 2013 we have trained **770 teaching** and learning support staff over the course of our project in the schools, and exhibited or spoken at **51 events** or conferences across the health, education and social care sectors, from events for school nurses, learning disability nurses, eye care professionals to QTVIs (specialist visual impairment teachers).

We have authored **12 publications, articles and blogs** for others on this subject including a free mini guide with the national association of special educational needs (NASEN) on understanding eye care and vision children with SEND and a booklet about the eye test for Makaton users. Members of our team have been shortlisted for awards, including Medical Journalist of the Year, with Ned Saunders winning the prestigious dispensing optician of the year Optician Award 2017!

Our information is being used in continued education and training for the optical profession with CET articles in Optician, Optometry Today and Dispensing Optics.

We have had academic posters accepted by the British Association of Childhood Disability and Optometry Tomorrow and have been invited to present our findings at conferences such as the Royal College of Ophthalmologists congress, Association of Independent Optometrists and England Vision Strategy.

Our easy read information, freshly revamped in early 2017 and freely available on our website on eyes and vision has been viewed **nearly 30,000 times** since their launch, including a new feedback form 'about the results of your child's sight test, especially developed with our collaborators at Ulster University's Centre for Optometry and Vision Science Research.

In 2019 we were also awarded funding from The National Lottery Community Fund for **employing 7 people with lived or work experience of learning disability, autism and sight loss** to make people with learning disabilities, supporters and professionals in London and the North West eye care aware. The Every Day in Focus project will support the roll out of the service in special schools in those areas.



SeeAbility providing teacher training on eyes and vision at Moorcroft School

## A campaign that changed NHS policy

In August 2015 SeeAbility was granted a General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) contract by NHS England. The NHS had long recognised that day centres and residential care settings were places where NHS sight tests could take place, but it had yet to accept that they could take place in special schools.

While we were pleased to be the first NHS GOS contractor to be able to operate in special schools, this would be at a flat fee of £21.31 per sight test – the same as is paid for any ‘standard’ community sight test. It was clear that the legal, contracting and funding framework for primary eye care needed reform. With children having routine eye exams in hospital eye clinics that are struggling to meet demand, and the health inequalities suffered by those with learning disabilities and autism a huge cause of concern, this has been an issue that resonated with policymakers.

The case for reform picked up pace as SeeAbility produced more evidence and data, with our findings featured on TV, radio and newspapers, petitions and letters supported by professional bodies and other charities, and questions asked in parliament.

With endorsement of a sector led framework based on the SeeAbility model by clinicians and professional and public health bodies, 2018 saw a full focus by NHS England policymakers on the need to transform eye care for those with learning

disabilities, starting in special schools but also looking to future community practice reforms too.

Supported by the clinical priority for learning disability and autism in the NHS 10 year Long Term Plan, published in 2019, we are now at a point where there will be a new national programme of eye care in England’s special schools, with a possible start date of April 2020, gradually reaching over 120,000 children.

**Thank you to all the individuals, organisations, politicians and policymakers who have lent their support to this campaign and progressing these changes.**



*Gella is getting on well with her new glasses*

## Get involved!

“ I have learnt so much over the past 6 months working as part of the special schools team ”

To be successful it is vital that eye care professionals, from optometrists, orthoptists, dispensing opticians and ophthalmologists support the new programme, adding to the eye care workforce already out there working in special schools. And of course it's vital that schools and teaching staff want to engage with the new programme too!

Here some of the professionals involved in the project talk about what it has meant to them.



Martyn, SeeAbility's dispensing optician, supporting Eli with his new glasses

Martyn (pictured) is one of our new dispensing opticians. He says:

*"I have learnt so much over the past 6 months working as part of the special schools team. The prospect of a new national programme in special schools is so exciting for our profession. To any colleagues out there, I would say set aside time to find out more, and visit any local schemes, not just for your own professional development but for understanding the impact this can have on these children's lives. You take this knowledge back to high street practice too, as you will realise many of the skills gained in supporting children and families who access your practice on a daily basis."*

“ Now we have children who are demanding to have glasses and looking after them too! ”

Martina (pictured) is a Qualified Teacher of Visual Impairment at the The Village School. Thinking ahead to a national programme, she says:

“It is a fantastic opportunity because the students, parents and staff in the school will have the insight into how the tests are done. We learn things from being present in the clinics, and it breaks down the barriers between professions. Before the service it was like working in the dark. We didn't have access to any clinical information. We knew children had problems and might benefit from some support. With SeeAbility on board we know how to adapt resources, to think beyond the usual, and be creative. Now we have children who are demanding to have glasses and looking after them too!”



Martina, a QTVI with her pupil Gella

## Milestones

**2013**

**We begin our work in special schools**

**2015**

**We publish our first report on our first 250 sight tests**

**NHS England recognises its primary eye care contract for day centres can include special schools (£21.31 a sight test)**

**We hold a major conference on Cerebral Visual Impairment**

**Siobhain McDonagh MP visits Perseid School, and holds a debate in parliament**

**2016**

**A visit by the then eye care Minister, Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP, and award of three years of Department of Health innovation funding**

**We launch a major new report on the eye care needs of those with learning disabilities, with Lord Holmes of Richmond, in parliament**

**We develop and agree a new clinical sector led framework with the key eye care professional bodies to support a special schools programme**

**2017**

**Public Health England recommends the framework as an alternative pathway in special schools to vision screening**

**Our dispensing optician Ned Saunders wins Dispensing Optician of the year at the Optician magazine awards**

**2018**

**NHS England convene a new working group to take forward a new special schools programme**

**2019**

**We publish our work in international science journal PLOS One, becoming the biggest study actively reporting on the eye care needs of children with learning disabilities**

**2020**

**The future - for the planned NHS launch of a new programme in England's special schools**

## The last word

“ My name is Nathaniel. I like my glasses. I use them to read.”

Nathaniel is extremely short-sighted. Without glasses, his world is limited to just a few centimetres in front of his face. Everything else is just a blur.

To put that into context, severe short-sightedness starts at minus 6. Nathaniel is minus 18. Add in a profound hearing problem and you realise just how important glasses are to him. Nathaniel needs them from the moment he wakes up in order to make sense of things visually.

However, no one knew just how much Nathaniel needed glasses until SeeAbility visited his special school and gave him a sight test. Before getting his glasses, his isolation and distraction was resulting in behaviours that challenge.

Because Nathaniel is very short-sighted, he is at increased risk of retinal detachment, a problem that needs swift action if detected as it can potentially lead to blindness. This means regular eye care is very important.

That was back in 2015 – now four years on Nathaniel is at the start of an exciting new time in his life moving on from school and college with the clear vision he needs to make a success of his life. Our eye care team who have worked with Nathaniel will miss his happy smile and thumbs up when we see him!

Thank you Nathaniel for being willing to share your story.



Nathaniel with our dispensing optician, Mitch

## Acknowledgements

We are so grateful to everyone who has worked in the Children in Focus programme, and the many other organisations and people who have given their time to support and advise our team over the years. We are also very grateful to all our generous donors and supporters for enabling us to continue our specialist work. The past six years would not have been possible without this support. We would like to pay special thanks to:

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Elbi

Flying Buttress Partners Ltd

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*Zaid can now enjoy his art class because he can see more clearly*

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