

PINDERS

SENCO SUPPORT PACK

Supporting pupils experiencing visual discomfort when reading

A practical observation, classroom-support and referral guide for schools

Key principle: Visual discomfort can affect reading comfort and concentration, but the signs are not specific to one condition. School observations can support a referral; they do not provide a diagnosis.

Purpose of this pack

This resource helps teachers and SENCOs recognise when a pupil may be experiencing visual discomfort, make proportionate classroom adjustments, and guide parents or carers towards an appropriate Eye Examination.

A simple pathway

1	Observe	Record what the pupil reports and what staff notice, including when and how often it occurs.
2	Support	Try low-risk classroom adjustments and note whether they help consistently.
3	Inform	Share observations with the parent or carer and recommend an Eye Examination where symptoms are persistent, significant or affecting learning.
4	Assess	An optometrist can consider refractive, ocular-health and binocular-vision factors, then advise whether any further assessment is appropriate.

School observation checklist

Use this checklist to record observations and the pupil's own description. It is not a diagnostic or pass/fail screening tool. Consider frequency, persistence and impact rather than counting ticks.

What the pupil may report

☐	Words or lines appear to move, blur, shimmer or become difficult to keep clear
☐	Bright white pages or screens feel uncomfortable or dazzling
☐	Headache, sore eyes or eye strain during or after sustained near work
☐	Difficulty keeping their place or sustaining focus on text
☐	Reading feels more comfortable under particular lighting or with reduced glare

What staff may notice

☐	Avoids or becomes unsettled during sustained reading tasks
☐	Frequently loses place, skips lines or uses a finger or ruler to track
☐	Reads more slowly or inconsistently as a task continues
☐	Squints, rubs eyes, moves unusually close to the page or changes head position
☐	Finds visually crowded worksheets harder to manage

Observation notes

When does it happen? _____

How often and for how long?

What is the effect on learning or comfort?

What has helped, if anything?

Recommend an Eye Examination when: symptoms are persistent, recurring, significant, worsening or affecting participation and learning. Do not rely on a set number of ticked items.

Classroom support while awaiting assessment

These adjustments are intended to improve access and comfort. Introduce one or two changes at a time, involve the pupil, and record whether the benefit is clear and repeatable.

Reduce glare: Adjust screen brightness, consider screen position and reflections, and offer a low-glare place to work.

Improve page layout: Use clear fonts, adequate font size and line spacing, uncluttered worksheets and generous spacing between questions.

Support tracking: Allow a plain reading ruler, line guide or finger tracking where helpful.

Manage visual demand: Break longer reading tasks into shorter sections and allow brief, regular pauses.

Offer accessible formats: Where practical, provide digital text that allows the pupil to adjust size, spacing, contrast and background.

If exploring colour

Some pupils report improved comfort with a coloured overlay or altered screen background; others experience no benefit. Colour preference is individual and may vary.

- Use the pupil's usual reading material and compare comfort with and without the option.
- Ask neutral questions such as: 'Which feels more comfortable?' and 'Can you notice any difference?'
- Avoid telling the pupil that a particular colour should help.
- Look for a clear, repeatable benefit across more than one occasion.
- Stop using an overlay or colour setting if it is uncomfortable, distracting or provides no consistent benefit.

Important: A preferred overlay or background colour does not diagnose visual stress and is not the same as a precision tint. Do not delay an Eye Examination while trialling classroom adjustments.

Record the response

Date / task	Adjustment tried	Pupil's comments	Staff observation

Referral and clinical pathway

1. Share observations with the parent or carer

Explain what the pupil has reported, what staff have observed, and which classroom adjustments have been tried. Avoid presenting visual stress as a confirmed diagnosis.

2. Recommend an Eye Examination

An Eye Examination should usually be the first clinical step. The optometrist can assess vision, refractive needs and eye health, and may also consider binocular-vision factors. NHS-funded Eye Examinations are available to children and young people who meet the NHS eligibility criteria.

3. Consider further assessment when appropriate

If relevant symptoms remain after the Eye Examination and any recommended management, the optometrist can advise whether a further binocular-vision, overlay or colorimetry assessment may be helpful. Not every pupil will require each stage, and colour-based options do not help everyone.

What Pinders may provide

- An explanation of the findings and recommended next steps
- Advice on any required prescription eyewear or binocular-vision management
- Where clinically appropriate, assessment of whether an overlay or precision tint provides a useful, repeatable improvement in comfort
- A written summary for the parent or carer, including practical recommendations

Information sharing and consent

Clinical information belongs to the pupil and their parent or carer. Pinders will only share an assessment summary with the school when appropriate consent has been obtained. Schools should follow their own data-protection and record-keeping procedures.

Please seek prompt clinical advice: if a pupil reports sudden changes in vision, persistent double vision, eye pain, flashes, new floaters or a marked deterioration. Urgency should be guided by the symptoms rather than this checklist.

Pinders Visual Stress Clinic

Further assessments are available at our Southwell branch when clinically appropriate following an Eye Examination.

Web: pindersopticians.co.uk **Telephone:** 01636 812286

PINDERS

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

When reading causes visual discomfort

Your child's school has noticed, or your child has reported, some difficulty or discomfort during reading or other close work. This does not necessarily mean that your child has an eye condition or visual stress. Similar signs can have a number of causes.

What might a child experience?

- Headaches, sore eyes or eye strain during sustained reading
- Words or lines appearing blurred, unstable or difficult to follow
- Discomfort from bright pages, screens or glare
- Difficulty keeping their place or concentrating on text
- Avoidance of reading because it feels uncomfortable

What should happen next?

The first clinical step is an Eye Examination. This checks vision, refractive needs and eye health and may identify other visual factors that require attention. NHS-funded Eye Examinations are available to children and young people who meet the NHS eligibility criteria.

If symptoms remain after the Eye Examination and any recommended management, the optometrist may suggest a further assessment. This could include binocular-vision assessment or, where appropriate, investigation of whether a coloured overlay or precision tint provides a useful and repeatable improvement in comfort.

Please note: Colour can help some children feel more comfortable, but it does not help everyone. A preference for coloured paper or an overlay is not, by itself, a diagnosis.

What information should I bring?

- The school's observation checklist or examples of when the difficulty occurs
- Details of headaches, visual symptoms and how long they last
- The child's current eyewear and any previous eye-care information

Booking with Pinders

You may book an Eye Examination with Pinders. If a further assessment is appropriate, we will explain the options and any associated fees before proceeding.

Southwell branch | 01636 812286 | pindersopticians.co.uk

School contact: _____ Date: _____