

Survey of parents using the NHS Special Schools Eye Care Service that is provided by SeeAbility

Introduction

SeeAbility currently provides this NHS funded service across 33 school sites in London under a contract adhering to a NHS service specification. Prior to 2021 we were delivering a similar model of care in a smaller number of schools as a fundraised project.

The team is made up of 12 optometrists and 8 dispensing opticians, the majority of whom also work in other settings (such as hospitals and optical practices). The team is supported by 2 administration assistants, a practice manager and part time clinical lead. This also enables us to offer training to school staff.

Last year (April 2022 – March 2023) we provided 2799 full eye tests and dispensed 1800 pairs of glasses and carried out repairs and adjustments to glasses as required. All parents receive a user friendly report on their child's eyesight and vision.

SeeAbility has run annual satisfaction surveys with parents to enable us to make the case for this model of eye care delivery and learn from feedback to continuously improve.

This year we opened a survey in early March 2023 using Microsoft Forms. The survey closed at the start of April 2023, to enable analysis for the spring school term and for our SeeAbility Impact Report which is published each September.

For ease of use for SEND parents, the questions were mostly based on a five point Likert Scale of strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree or strongly disagree to a number of statements. Parents could choose to anonymously fill in the survey if they wished (only 6 did anonymously).

- 2186 questionnaires were emailed to parents currently using the service. 11 responses were excluded from the analysis as they were sent to parents of children no longer under the care of the service who had moved school. Therefore of 2175 parents using the service currently there were 414 responses = 19% response rate
- Of the 405 parents who responded to the question 'Has your child received glasses from SeeAbility?', 172 said yes (42%).

Results

Results came back from parents across all schools which SeeAbility supports. The following statistics provide a summary from the feedback of 414 parents:

Overall satisfaction

There were high satisfaction rates with the service.

97% of parents agreed or strongly agreed they were happy with the service they and their child receives from SeeAbility. Of these 78% strongly agreed. Most of the remainder (2.9%) neither agreed or disagreed and 1 parent disagreed which is being followed up.

98% of parents agreed or strongly agreed they would recommend the SeeAbility eye care service to other parents. Of these 78% strongly agreed. Of the 2% remainder of parents most were neutral with two cases of disagreement being followed up.

When asked for three words to describe the service the following words were most frequent



Quotes included:

"The eye exam takes place in a trusted place, school. The staff understand the disabilities of each of their clients. They take appropriate steps to make my son at ease, especially as he is a selective mute and will not talk. There are no overwhelming queues, waiting times, noises, lights and endless stream of customers/patients at school. My child is hyper vigilant and having this service available through his school has been a Godsend. How can you improve on excellence. I love getting the detailed report and seeing what changes if any happen over the year. I love the way the team manage to make it a positive experience for my son."

"My son has had life changing support now he has his glasses he can continue to make progress across all areas of his learning and life. Without SeeAbility my son would not be wearing glasses as high street optician would not be able to meet his needs. You have literally changed my sons life. Big thanks to SeeAbility. Please keep shining a light on your amazing services."

"See ability picked up something with my sons eyes that no other optician has, which resulted in emergency care and referrals swiftly! I can never thank the team enough, my son has never felt so comfortable during an eye test!"

"Compared to taking my son to the hospital for every appointment your service is 100 times better.... After years of anxiety and meltdowns at hospital appointments with my son your service has made a huge difference to us."

Of the 172 parents who reported that their children had glasses from SeeAbility

98% of parents agreed or strongly agreed they were happy with the glasses they received from SeeAbility. 83% of parents strongly agreed.

"My daughter is looking around more now that she has her glasses. If it wasn't for SeeAbility I wouldn't have any input into her vision. She has a strap attached to glasses to help them from getting lost."

"Enabled access to safe glasses for my son since he chews through everything. High street opticians don't have specialist glass frames and since the clinic closed we had struggled to cash his prescriptions until Seeability came into his school. This service has reduced the number of hospital visits I have to make and also having to take him out of school for appointments."

Strong support for the benefits of in school eye care

98% of parents agreed or strongly agreed when asked if there should be a special schools eye care service in every special school in England. The remainder 2% were neutral. 85% strongly agreed.

"Taking a child with ASD and ADHD to see any doctor or specialist is very hard for the child and parents. To organize this on top of every other service we need access to is also hard which means without seeability my daughter would not be taken to an eye specialist at all. The fact that she is given this service free, at school, with people my daughter is comfortable with is such a huge convenience and blessing that only SEN parents can understand the huge impact this has on disabled children and families. I hope this service continues and gets expanded."

"SeeAbility have been excellent in their services, with all the stress and appointments we as parents have for our special needs child it is comforting to know that as far as their sight is concerned it is all managed under one roof at school where if this service wasn't available a lot of children may never get their eyes checked which long term would give NHS more problems going forward."

"Children feel safer in a school environment and that is the best place for them to be checked and this service really helps children with disabilities come to terms with their vision that high street or doctors can't do."

"I had given up taking him to the hospital due to the extreme stress and anxiety it caused him. He is nearly 14 and I could not physically restrain him to allow the eye care consultant to look at his eyes. At school he is much calmer he see's the same optician each time and she uses various methods (other than eyedrops which he hated) to examine his eyes. A brilliant service that should be rolled out to all Special Schools."

Previous [published data](#) shows 44% of special school students have a history of hospital eye care, 44% no eye care history and 10.7% had ever accessed a community optical practice.

85% of parents said the first choice to receive eye care for their child would be their special school. 12% said hospital and of the remainder 1.7% said opticians. 2 parents said at home. A similar number of parents (84%) said their first choice for glasses dispensing would be school.

A number of comments did come back comparing poor experiences in hospital or optical practices and how fragmented access has been.

"I have experienced my child having eye tests in the hands of people who fail to understand my child's difficulties to communicate. Resulting in no patience, comments and inaccurate results. SeeAbility have given me experiences of stress-free, happy and successful. I am happy and so is my son."

"Having SeeAbility going into school has been an absolute game changer. Previously, appointments at the local eye hospital were traumatic both for my son & myself. He gets very anxious going to hospital anyway but waiting to be seen added to that anxiety. Majority of Staff appeared poorly trained in working with children with additional needs so eye tests often unsuccessful & lacking meaningful results. We often left before tests were completed, both upset & often me having been hurt by my son due to his heightened anxiety. Having an eye test in school removes the anxiety of a hospital visit, there is no unnecessary waiting & the test is carried out in a familiar setting, reducing any anxiety. Staff appear very well trained & tests are appropriate and adapted to suit individual children yielding meaningful and thorough results. Cannot praise this service highly enough."

"A kind & helpful service who understand the different needs of the disabled children they visit in school...We used to attend a clinic who failed to even assess our daughter as their ways of doing it scared her (shining lights in her eyes, insisting on drops being put in) and she hated it. Staff who didn't understand the different needs of a disabled and autistic person. For years she didn't have glasses because they couldn't assess her. Seeability quietly and calmly undid that fear, assessed her and gave her glasses that she won't take off now because she can actually see. Amazing Seeability! Thank you!!"

Even for parents who indicated a first choice preference for hospital services there was still recognition of the benefits in school and strong agreement the service should be in every special school.

"Seeability has really helped and understood my daughter's complex needs and makes her experience a really comfortable and happy one, they are amazing!"

"As well as going to see my son in school, they involved me in decision making and responded well to any concerns I had relating to the comfort of my sons glasses."

Collaboration and communication

Parents are invited to attend the sight test in school, although the majority choose not to. However, they receive a plain English report after the sight test and follow up contact, so we asked how much parents understand more about their child's vision.

93% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that they understood more about their child's vision. 66% of parents strongly agreed. Of the remainder again most were neutral and 4 parents disagreed.

"Without having SeeAbility, I wouldn't know that my child is short sighted and needed glasses as it is impossible to take an autistic child to an optician to get his eyes examined. They helped us to get my child his glasses and made sure his eyes are checked which is the most appreciated thing. Now my child wears his glasses and can see further when he's outside."

"I always suspected that she had some visual processing issues, but all eye checks always normal. Seability was able to diagnose her evident lower field defect in her vision, and we are grateful. Thank you so much and I really hope you continue providing this incredible service for all children with a disability. The service has an amazing communication, always replying emails and calls. Thank you SO much."

"Seeability worked to understand my son's capabilities and provided him with an opportunity to use the vision he has. Recently within a routine school visits, one of the Seeability workers, instigated a referral for cataracts in my sons eyes. My son was referred to Hospital, to meet with a professor and thankfully does not require surgery at the moment. But through this service, the changes in my son's eyes were picked up."

The area for most follow up was based on communication but feedback was still positive. **84% of parents agreed or strongly agreed** they knew how to contact the SeeAbility eye care team if needed. While most of the other responses neither agreed or disagreed, 6% (25 parents) disagreed.

Gaining and sustaining glasses wear

Parents often commented on how hard it has been to get glasses or for their child to get used to glasses. **77% of parents agreed or strongly agreed** the SeeAbility service had helped their child to wear their glasses successfully. 20% of parents were neutral here, and 6 parents disagreed.

"Within 1 visit from seeability my son now has glasses he has probably needed for years. I have also noticed a decrease in the number of headaches he would have and be sick as a result of the headache. Thank you for providing this much needed service to our children."

"My child used to go to Hospital. He never liked the experience and also never wore his glasses, ever. When i heard about the SeeAbility service I thought that maybe that would be better. As soon as he was seen by them and with the class environment that is known to him and comfortable with, he then started wearing his glasses very soon after. They advised both his class teachers and contacted me on how to get him to wear the glasses. (We had tried for years to make him to wear his glasses with no success)....It has made a big difference to my son as he will now be able to see his environment better, which in turn will help him with his learning. I am very appreciative of this service and I am very glad it exists. By far the best service that has been provided to my son."

"Having SeeAbility come into his school where he feels safe has made such a difference. He has built a relationship with the SeeAbility team he now enjoys it and it is not seen as a conflict. It has meant he wears his glasses full time as they fit properly. If there is ever a problem with his glasses SeeAbility react very quickly to solve it.... Before SeeAbility my son got his glasses from a local optician and there was a real problem fitting his glasses and making sure they were the right ones. SeeAbility now see him in a relaxed environment for fitting and getting the right pair which fit well. This has made a huge difference to how he now wears his glasses (now all day, while before he was always taking them on and off)."

Areas for improvement

Where there was disagreement around elements of the Service these are being followed up individually. Despite almost universal satisfaction, the most comments in relation to improving the service were knowing how to the contact the team.

This could be a symptom of the 'opt out' commissioned model which was designed to help ensure as many children were seen, and prompts discussion as to whether changing to a 'opt in' model of care might be better to more clearly establish a relationship between parents/carers and the clinical team. This is especially around the ongoing support needed with glasses.

"Let parents know in a timely manner what will happen and when, We were initially in the dark - filled in the paperwork and heard nothing back for what seemed like a long time."

"A bit more engagement with parents after each school visit."

"My son still refusing to use his glasses, he only put them on in school because he wears soft hearing aid band in same time, he is refusing to wear both in same time."

Final comment

"Just to reach as many children and adults with special needs as possible, as it's the only way that most of them will have access to an eye care service."