

SES Sight Check Survey for Parents

Survey period: 30 September -9 October 2025

Project manager: Dawn Bamforth

Response rate: 51

Does your child attend a Special Educational Setting?

49/51 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Yes 94.1% (48 choices)



No answer 3.9% (2 choices)



No 2% (1 choice)



Sight check experiences

Has your child ever had a sight check in school or elsewhere?

49/51 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Yes 78.4% (40 choices)



No 11.8% (6 choices)



Not sure 5.9% (3 choices)



No answer 3.9% (2 choices)



English

What do you or your child think was good, or not so good, about that experience?

Many respondents reported negative experiences with high street opticians, particularly regarding a lack of understanding and accommodation for children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). Several mentioned that staff were not adequately trained to support their children's needs, leading to rushed, stressful, or overwhelming appointments. Common issues included staff not engaging with or understanding the child, insufficient time allowed, and environments that were overwhelming or not accessible.

Hospital-based eye checks were generally viewed more positively, with respondents noting helpful, competent, and understanding staff, as well as better accommodation for children with complex needs. However, some highlighted the inconvenience of multiple appointments, time out of school/work, and distress caused by certain procedures (e.g., eye drops).

A recurring theme was the difficulty children had in understanding or participating in the tests, especially for those who are preverbal, have communication difficulties, or complex needs. Some parents felt unsure if their child's eyesight was properly assessed as a result.

A few respondents mentioned positive experiences when staff took extra time, explained procedures, or created a calm environment. There was also mention of the value of school-based or familiar settings for sight checks, especially for children who struggle with unfamiliar environments or have mobility issues.

Some highlighted the need for more specialist equipment and options for conditions like CVI (Cerebral Visual Impairment), which are not always available or recognised in standard optician settings.

In summary, the main concerns were lack of staff training and understanding in high street settings, inaccessible or overwhelming environments, and challenges for children with complex needs. Hospital clinics were generally preferred but not always convenient. There is a clear desire for more accessible, accommodating, and specialist sight check services, ideally in familiar or school-based settings.

Does your child already wear spectacles (glasses)?

40/51 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

no 47.1% (24 choices)



yes - all the time 21.6% (11 choices)



No answer 21.6% (11 choices)



yes - for some activities 9.8% (5 choices)



English

Creating the right environment

What kind of environments help your child feel calm and safe during checks or assessments?

49/51 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

Having a familiar adult present 90.2% (46 choices)



Quiet space 88.2% (45 choices)



Visual supports (e.g. pictures, symbols) 68.6% (35 choices)



Clear explanations beforehand about what will happen 66.7% (34 choices)



Flexible timing or breaks 54.9% (28 choices)



Fidget toys or sensory tools 45.1% (23 choices)



No answer 3.9% (2 choices)



Other - please tell us 9.8% (5 choices)



Other - please tell us (5)

- Has to be very simple instructions
- None of the above (all aimed at high functioning autistic children, as usual) works with a child who is non verbal with profound learning disabilities who cannot understand instructions or talk
- Not too dark where possible
- Plenty of prior warning both in advance and on the day to allow to both anticipate and process what is happening and required.
- Visual explanation about exactly what will have a loads of reassurance that it won't be painful



English

What support is needed for your child if they are non-verbal, anxious, or have complex needs?

40/51 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

Extended time or flexible approach 60.8% (31 choices)



Support from trusted adults 58.8% (30 choices)



Visual communication tools 33.3% (17 choices)



No answer 21.6% (11 choices)



Individualised planning 19.6% (10 choices)



Not applicable to my child 7.8% (4 choices)



Other - please tell us 9.8% (5 choices)



Other - please tell us (5)

- Clear understanding of child from reading notes beforehand, call with parent or school to assess level of understanding
- I will tolerate tests for a limited period so it is important there is no unnecessary waiting
- Specialists who can think outside the box as my son is non verbal and needs a very in tune/ positive person to work with him
- The healthcare professional talking to us for 10mins in advance will greatly increase the chances of success of any procedure with our son. So we can pass on the latest info that is working to help him.
- Wheelchair access

Designing a better service

What would help your child be prepared for a sight check?

The most common request from respondents was for a social story to help prepare their child for a sight check, often accompanied by visuals, photos, or videos showing what will happen, who will be there, and what the environment will look like. Videos were also specifically mentioned as helpful, especially if they clearly demonstrate the process.

Many parents emphasised the importance of clear, simple explanations and reassurance, including information about what will happen, how long it will take, and that it will not hurt. Several respondents noted that advance warning, time to process, and preparatory discussion are important, as some children need extra time to understand and adjust.

Familiarity was another key theme: a familiar setting (such as school or home), familiar adults, and familiar faces were all mentioned as helpful. Some suggested meeting the optician beforehand or using characters from books or films to make the experience less intimidating.

A few parents highlighted the need for flexibility, such as allowing extra time for appointments, not keeping children waiting, and adapting communication to the child's needs (e.g., using Makaton/BSL, short sentences, or now-and-next boards). One respondent stressed that standard sight test activities do not work for their child and that individual needs should be discussed with parents.

A small number of responses mentioned challenges in completing sight checks despite preparation and one noted a strong dislike of eye drops.

Overall, the main trends are the need for visual and narrative preparation (social stories, videos, photos), clear and simple information, reassurance, familiar environments and people, and flexibility to accommodate individual needs and processing time.



We know how important it is to make adjustments for your child's successful appointment. How would you like to be involved as a parent/carer before, during, and after the check?

Most respondents strongly emphasised the importance of being present at their child's sight check appointment, or at least having the option to attend. Many noted that their child would need their support due to communication, comprehension, or anxiety needs, and that a familiar face is reassuring. Some mentioned that if they cannot attend, a trusted adult or teaching assistant should be present.

Advance notice and clear communication before the appointment were repeatedly highlighted as essential. Parents want to know the date, time, location, who will be present, and what to expect, ideally with at least several days' notice so they can prepare their child. Suggestions included social stories, visuals, and pictures of the setting to help children understand and feel comfortable.

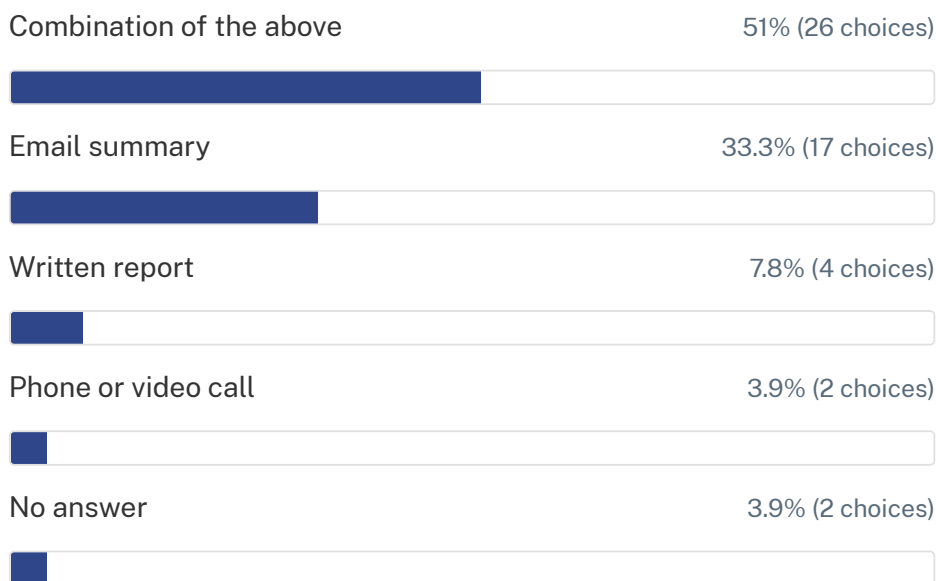
Parents also want feedback after the appointment, including clear explanations of results and next steps, whether or not any issues are found. Several respondents requested communication by phone or email if they cannot attend.

A few mentioned the need for reasonable adjustments such as wheelchair accessibility, extra time, and minimal interruptions. Some noted that for children already familiar with eye tests, less involvement may be needed.

Overall, the main trends are: parents want to be present or have the option to attend, require clear and timely information before and after the appointment, and value adjustments and communication tailored to their child's individual needs.

How should the results or outcomes be shared with you?

49/51 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional



English

Once the service is running, how would you like to be kept informed or give feedback?

43/51 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

Email contact 54.9% (28 choices)



Online feedback form 47.1% (24 choices)



No answer 15.7% (8 choices)



Parent group discussions 9.8% (5 choices)



I don't want to give feedback 0% (0 choices)



Other - please tell us 0% (0 choices)



Can you share any examples of good practice we could learn from?

Respondents most frequently emphasised the importance of a calm, patient, and flexible approach when working with children, especially those with autism or learning disabilities. Many highlighted the need for appointments not to be rushed, allowing plenty of time for the child to process and engage. Clear communication, both with the child and parents, was repeatedly mentioned as good practice, including explaining procedures, giving advance warning, and providing updates if appointments are delayed.

Flexibility and individualised approaches were valued, such as adapting procedures to the child's needs or offering alternatives (e.g., flu jab at GP instead of nasal spray at school). Several respondents praised services that take place in familiar or convenient settings, such as clinics in schools or home visits, and those that involve parents in planning.

Good practice examples included staff being well-trained in SEND, being inclusive, and understanding the specific needs of children with severe autism or learning disabilities [b9c06d2a-13b8-40d6-af8e-26f91d37217]. Respondents also valued when children were allowed to familiarise themselves with equipment and when movement breaks were permitted.

Some respondents mentioned positive experiences with specific services, such as specialist dental services, paediatricians, and immunisation teams, especially when these services demonstrated flexibility and clear communication. A few respondents noted the value of learning disability nurses and the importance of staff being approachable and willing to try different methods.

A minority of respondents had not experienced good practice or felt there was a lack of understanding in services.

Overall, the main themes were the need for patience, flexibility, clear communication, and individualised, inclusive approaches.



English

If we could only do one thing right in this new service, what should it be?

Communication with parents and children was the most frequently mentioned priority, including clear communication before, during, and after the sight check, and ensuring parents understand the outcomes. Many respondents stressed the need for staff to be patient, calm, and not to rush the process.

Adapting to each child's individual needs, including being flexible, understanding additional needs, and preparing in advance, was also a strong theme. Several parents highlighted the importance of staff being appropriately trained, especially in working with children with special educational needs.

Some respondents wanted the service to be delivered in school to minimise disruption and avoid repeated removals from class and to ensure it is available across all special settings.

Other suggestions included using visuals and social stories to prepare children involving parents in the process and listening to those with lived experience. There were also calls for respect, assuming competence, and avoiding dehumanising practices.

A few parents mentioned practicalities such as appointment timing, minimising extra sensory input, and being efficient but not rushed.

Overall, the strongest trends were around communication, individualised and respectful approaches, staff training, and minimising disruption to children's routines.



Is there anything else you want decision-makers to know based on your experience?

Respondents consistently emphasised the importance of treating children and young people with respect and involving them directly in discussions about their care, rather than talking over or about them. Many highlighted the need to address children according to their actual age, not just their perceived developmental level, and to avoid patronising gestures such as giving teenagers stickers.

A recurring theme was the necessity for staff to have experience and knowledge of special educational needs (SEN), as well as patience and an understanding that children may require more time to process information or complete tests. Respondents also stressed the importance of professionalism and not making SEN children or their families feel like a burden.

There were concerns about limited access to suitable opticians, especially in certain areas, making a dedicated service highly valued. Some questioned why there isn't already a specialist sight service, given the existence of special care dentistry.

Practical challenges were raised, such as the difficulty of keeping track of glasses for children with severe learning disabilities, with suggestions for providing multiple pairs to accommodate losses or breakages. The need for better integration between testing and fitting services was also mentioned.

Some parents noted that children in independent specialist schools or those out of school can miss out on health programmes, including sight checks. The value of annual checks in school settings was highlighted as a way to reduce travel and increase uptake.

Finally, several responses called for greater patience, understanding that behaviour is a form of communication, and a collaborative approach to address health inequalities faced by people with learning disabilities.



Quotes:

'T struggles with sight tests. He can't sit still, so they struggle to get accurate readings for him. So maybe some way of making it more interesting for them. And he doesn't like the picture card things. Because some of them confuse him. So maybe easier pictures for them to understand.'

'I think the biggest thing for A -and probably for most of our medically complex kids -is to be calm and talk to them like they understand everything. Because although they may not understand everything, they still do understand a lot and also just the talking helps. So many people walk up to A and start doing stuff without telling her what they're doing and it triggers her anxiety because she's so scared of what people are going to do, especially in medical settings.'

'A can make basic choices if she's given time. She wanted blue glasses at her last appointment - they didn't have them but she was given that choice, which was good enough for us!'

'A will only look at things he cares about. He has no interest in a boring black duck on a square. His most recent sight test the tech asked me to turn his song volume off and took my phone and he followed the screen. Patience is crucial, just because A chooses not to look doesn't mean he can't see it, it means he doesn't want to look at it right that second when you're asking him to. Just because he can't reply to you doesn't mean he doesn't understand. He needs more time to process what you're asking... he has an aversion to people putting things near his face from having an NG tube. So he will recoil if you try and place a hand over one eye for example you need to go slowly and let him know it's 'gentle'.

'F has his eyes tested at the hospital. The staff have been good with him making it fun. They always let him touch everything that's going towards him. The match part he finds brown and would be better with matching toys. Something that's there and not on a card.'

'..For me, I was told A can see some things but she has a severe sight impairment. But I never really knew how much she can see until her specialist sight impairment teacher broke down the info on her report and told me she can see like she's looking through an obscured bathroom window. That information was so helpful to understand how she could see.'

'In terms of giving us the information, an email would be good with the option for us to call or reply back with questions or further clarification if needed. As for preparing A for it... if there are specific visual cues they need to use, those images could be emailed to us prior to an appointment to familiarise the child with the pictures and talk to them about what's going to happen.'

'Most of my struggles with professionals have come with the fact that they think (child's) needs mean they don't understand but A absolutely does... showing him dummy equipment that might be used, images, a photograph of the person's face for example (would help).'

'I think I'd like to know in advance that (child's) eyes were being tested at school. Afterwards would like a copy of the results and advice on health of his eyes... he doesn't like anyone touching his face so getting precision measurements for glasses is going to be challenging.'

