Information for Parents of School Children with Nystagmus

These guidelines should be used discreetly and with acknowledgment that each pupil is an individual whose sight will vary.

1. Encourage the student to explain his/her visual needs; however, continual and undue attention to these should be avoided.

2. Allow books/objects to be held close to the eyes, the head tilted and any other body posture adopted if this enhances vision.

3. Provide the pupil with his own book/worksheet. Sharing is impossible.

4. Enlarging material will often help, although good contrast may suffice.

5. Wall displays for reference should be placed at eye level and where the pupil can stand close to it (not above a filing cabinet or table for example).

6. Ask the pupil where he/she would prefer to sit. It is often facing and near to the board, they should not sit to one side. He/she should be offered positions close to demonstrations during activities.

7. Store visual aids so that the student has easy access and can use them when he/she judges that they will be helpful.

8. Allow the use of prescribed tinted glasses, cap, hat, or eyeshade to reduce the effects of glare.

9. Read aloud when writing on the board; describe diagrams.

10. Allow sufficient time to complete tasks and to examine materials/objects.

11. Good (though not necessarily bright) lighting is essential. The light should be behind the student and directed onto the object being viewed. Matte surfaces for walls, boards, and paper prevent light reflection and glare.

12. Use strong color contrast between letters/figures/lines and background. These should be well spaced.
13. To keep track of where the pupil is up to when reading, a piece of dark card may be used or he/she can track with a finger. Exercise books with matte paper, different colors, and line spacing should be made available.

14. In ball games, it may be difficult for the student to follow a fast moving ball if they have poor vision or strabismus (misaligned eyes). Congenital nystagmus alone might limit effectiveness in the outfield.

The following is an example of a letter that may be sent to a teacher of a student with nystagmus

Dear Teacher:

[Student's name] has a complex eye condition called nystagmus. This means that the eyes make involuntary movements all the time. There is no cure. Glasses or contact lenses may be worn to correct other vision defects and may reduce the nystagmus.

The effects vary, but most individuals with nystagmus also have other, sensory, deficits that lead to poor vision. Near vision is usually better than distance vision.

The student may turn his/her head to one side to reduce the eye movement and achieve better vision. This is a compensatory head posture and should not be corrected or misinterpreted as cheating from another's work; the latter probably cannot be seen by the student with nystagmus. Vision becomes worse when the sufferer is tired, under stress, in strange surroundings, etc. At such times increased eye "wobble" will be noticeable.

Students with nystagmus usually manage very well at school with a little patience, understanding, and on occasions some extra help. BIG, BOLD, BRIGHT, and stationary are the guiding principles.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Nystagmus Network (U.K.) for permission to use this text, with minor revisions.