



Virtual School Sensory Support

Virtual School Sensory Support Newsletter

End of Year 2012 / 2013

Virtual School organises conference to celebrate 20 years of assessment and research into Visual Stress

Visual stress is a processing problem in which patterns of stripes, particularly in high contrast, cause hyperexcitability in the visual cortex of the brain, causing the print to appear distorted. Imagine trying to read this...

Visual Stress is a neurological condition, triggered by light, patterns, contrast and/or colour. This sensitivity to visual stimuli causes the visual cortex to become hyper-activated, leading to physical discomfort and perceptual distortions that interfere with reading, attention, coordination and general health and behaviour. Physical symptoms of Visual Stress include headaches, eye pain or strain, fatigue, and or nausea. Perceptual symptoms of Visual Stress include illusions of light and colour, instability of text, lines or patterns, and depth perception difficulties.

Or this...



Symptoms include headaches and rapid fatigue. Research has shown that as many as one in five people experience visual stress and one in a hundred can be significantly disadvantaged in tasks involving reading and writing. The good news is that the symptoms can be reduced by placing coloured filters, such as precision tinted lenses or coloured overlays, over the text.

Sensory Support have been working to support research and to assess young people in the county for this condition for the past twenty years. We are proud that to date several thousand young people have benefitted.

To celebrate this anniversary, a conference was held at Dereham Football Club on 12 July 2013. The conference was organised by staff from the Virtual School with the support of



Councillor Paul Williams and his partner Sarah (herself a parent of two young people who experience visual stress). We were lucky enough to have Professors Arnold Wilkins, of the University of Essex, and Bruce Evans, of City University London and the Institute of Optometry, as keynote speakers, together with Karen Monet, founder of the Visual Stress Association of Canada, who came all the way from her native country to share her images of visual stress and assessment techniques with us.

The conference was opened by Norman Lamb MP and closed by George Freeman MP, who promised that the Norfolk MPs, supported by the Bishop of Norwich in the House of Lords, would be working together in a non-party campaign to influence the government to incorporate visual stress tests within the NHS.

More than one hundred teachers, optometrists, advisory teachers, educational psychologists and parents attended and professionals were given an assessment pack with instructions such that, having been shown what to look for, they are able to assess young people in school to ensure that they no longer need to be disadvantaged by visual stress.

Elizabeth Ashby
Peripatetic Advisory Teacher VI

Mini Deaf Olympics 2013

Deaf children from across the county gathered together last Friday for a very special event hosted by Colman Junior School in Norwich. They were attending the very first Mini Deaf Olympics.

There were twenty-six children in total, some from as far away as Hunstanton and Great Yarmouth. In groups, they participated in sports activities such as the obstacle course and dressing up race, as well as activities that encouraged them to work in teams like the treasure hunt, and the challenge to make the tallest free-standing tower from newspaper.

Some of the children wear hearing aids, whereas others wear cochlear implants. Some use British Sign Language, and others spoken English. Regardless of these differences, they worked alongside one another to rise to the challenges together. Many of the children spend all of their time in a hearing world, and they may be the only Deaf person they know. The Mini Deaf Olympics provided a unique opportunity for them to meet other Deaf people (children and adults), to make connections, find common ground and understand that there are other Deaf people in the World.

The children involved in the event



were aged between 4 and 11 years old, but some older students were especially selected to assist the teams on the day.

They were Chloe Harries, Joshua Allard, Jacob King and Oliver Kenny. They worked extremely hard to ensure that the children enjoyed their day and – being Deaf themselves – were excellent role models for the younger children. Oliver Kenny, who will be competing in the Deaf Olympics 2013 (to be held in Sofia, Bulgaria later this year), gave a presentation to the group about his beginnings as a competitive swimmer and his inspiration to attend the Deaf equivalent of the Olympic Games.

The day was organised and run by staff at Virtual School Sensory Support (VSSS). Niel Willcott, who is the Chair of Governors at VSSS had the honour of awarding the children with their certificates of attendance.



With the sunny weather to help things along, the day was a roaring success and many of the children went home having made some new friends!

Chrystal Widdeson

Sponsored Walk

Congratulations to Amber McEwan, a student at Sprowston High School and her two close friends, Carolyn De Winnaar and Abbie-Rose Redington, who attend Notre Dame High School, for raising £250 for the RNIB. The three girls, who all have a visual impairment, completed a sponsored walk, an idea which they thought up and organised themselves. They walked from Cromer to Sheringham during February half term while the ground was covered with snow. Amber walked on crutches following a slip on the ice earlier in the week. Well done girls, we are proud of you!

Elizabeth Ashby
Peripatetic Advisory Teacher VI



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