



# Let's Talk Reading Irlen Screening Trial

**Spring/Summer 2025**

## Aim and Hypothesis

The trial aimed to explore the impact of Irlen Syndrome on reading skills of primary pupils.

The assumption at the beginning of the trial was that 40% of weak readers will have Irlen Syndrome/Visual Stress.

## Procedure

4 primary schools took part in the trial.

Each school had an Irlen awareness session for all staff. This took place before screening so that staff would be aware of what to look for when identifying pupils to be screened and would know how to support pupils who were diagnosed. Not all staff attended the sessions.

Schools identified pupils who may benefit from screening for Irlen.

Permission was sought from guardians of the children identified.

Screeners from Irlen East screened 20 selected pupils in each school. 80 pupils in total.

Members of staff in each school were trained as Irlen Screeners and given screener packs to continue screening beyond the trial. 7 members of staff have been trained as screeners in 4 schools, 2 in each of Ranelagh, Ravenswood and the Oaks, and 1 in Hillside.

Irlen East sent a report for each individual child diagnosed to the school by email. Schools were asked to send this information to parents.

Equipment was provided to children identified with Irlen Syndrome including overlays and coloured paper.

Irlen screeners returned to the schools 2 weeks after initial screening to discuss which children may benefit most from having tinted lenses.

A focus group session took place with pupils - Permission letters were sent out, via schools, to all parents of children who had experienced Irlen screening.

- Permission was given for 5 children to take part in the focus group at The Oaks and all children attended together.
- Ranelagh Primary School permission was agreed for 7 children; all came in one group.
- Permission slips were returned for 8 children at Ravenswood, who all attended together as time was limited due to a late start.

There was a planned format to the questioning, but it was flexible.

## Results

77 children were given a positive diagnosis of Irlen syndrome/Visual stress. This is a high percentage; however, children were chosen for screening based on information given in the awareness session about what to look for.

For each child diagnosed, the screeners left 2 overlays; 1 for school and 1 for home, Irlen contact information, and a leaflet (for parents). A report was sent by email to the school for each child asking them to forward a copy to parents.

2 staff at Ranelagh are actively screening other pupils. Staff in other schools have not yet had time to do any further screening.

## Discussion

This was an ambitious project with a tight deadline from the funding. Feedback was positive overall but there were some difficulties with implementation and follow up.

### Identified positive outcomes:

- Children diagnosed and equipment supplied
- Ongoing screening possible
- One parent was very excited to attend the tinting information session and was very engaged and enthusiastic about it.
- The difference to children who had been screened and were using resources was positive including to handwriting, reading, behaviour and confidence.

### Identified barriers:

- Funding was limited for tinted lenses:
  - 21 children had tinted lenses fully funded by LTR
  - 2 children had tints half funded by LTR and half funded by parents
  - 3 children had tints using other funding sources (Ropes Trust and Social care)

- 1 child had tints fully funded by family.
- Feedback from schools and Irlen East is that many more children would benefit from having tinted lenses.
- Irlen screeners had differing experiences. In one school they were screening in a room with no natural light, in another they had to always be with another member of staff when on the premises which meant that some screenings took place in a corner of a classroom where a phonics lesson was happening so was not ideal.
- Parents were encouraged to attend tinting sessions but just under half of them came along.

### Recommendations for improved practice include:

- The trial would have benefitted from more planning time, with school heads, class teachers and Irlen East.
- Space for screening should be identified early.
- Screening resources should be identified and available for all schools before any screening begins.
- Class teachers may benefit from more explicit training and explanation around the screening process.
- Parents/guardians should also be given more information about the screening process.
- Good practice sharing would help with resource management in the classroom for those new to supporting pupils with Irlen Syndrome.
- Schools should clearly record pupils' performance levels in all subjects prior to screening.
- Class teachers and parents should complete a pupil observation form. These should all be repeated periodically following screening.
- A meeting with parents following screening to explain the results and how they can support their child may help to prevent overlays getting lost at home or being forgotten about.
- Ideally, a staff member in school would be trained as the first step, with an agreement that they will have time allowed to screen pupils within the school. Screening would then be done solely by the school which would give the schools ownership

## Overall Feedback

### Teacher's views on screening process:

Positive comments	Negative Feedback	Neutral
process went 'Very well. It was very efficient and effective.'		'didn't have very much to do with the screening process.'
The process went 'Very easily, the trained staff member was excellent.'		
'I was not present but didn't consume too much time and the children were happy/fascinated upon return.'		
And in one school that it was 'Smoothly coordinated by SENDCo'		
'They also enjoyed the process. It was not daunting for them, and they understand.'		

### Children's responses in focus groups:

that once they were in the room with the screener the process was explained to them, and they relaxed a bit	they did not know why they were being taken to be screened and did not know what was going to happen in the screening	
enjoyed the screening session		
once they had tried the overlays for reading, they were relieved.		

### Regarding information sharing:

<p>‘We were informed verbally by our SEND lead and a letter for our files given as well as a letter to be sent to parents.’</p>	<p>However, some class teachers felt less well informed. When asked whether they received feedback they said:</p> <p>‘Only whether they needed an overlay and what colour was needed’</p>	
<p>Only one class teacher, of those who responded to the questionnaire, felt that the information they received was ‘somewhat unhelpful’. All the others felt that it was either very helpful or somewhat helpful.</p>	<p>Parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that they did not have a good understanding of Irlen Syndrome before their child was tested. Only one felt that they had a good understanding after the screening.</p>	
	<p>They said that the only information they received was a leaflet about Irlen syndrome and that they would like more information and a conversation with school or the screener.</p>	

## Outcomes:

<p>‘Some of their handwriting when using blue paper has certainly improved.’</p>	<p>One class teacher was not positive about the impact saying ‘Children with glasses don’t wear them, children with overlays rarely use them. They have them available but don’t use due to their choice despite reminders.’</p>	<p>‘Some like the overlays and say it helps. others don’t find it makes enough difference.’</p>
<p>‘Confidence when reading, handwriting, have significantly improved. Engagement is better. All round great.’</p>	<p>‘One parent got quite hostile about the concept of Irlen and refused to let her child use the overlay’</p>	<p>Children in one school were very positive about using their overlays but did not have access to coloured paper in any lessons and had not used coloured paper for writing although they were able to tell me what colours had been identified for them when they were screened.</p>
<p>‘One of our pupils has coloured lenses for glasses and his efforts are greatly improved as is his handwriting, even from when he used blue paper before.’</p>	<p>Another teacher was not happy with using the resources in class; ‘We don’t have books for writing, the coloured paper is too expensive, it’s difficult to get the right colour for all children (I have</p>	<p>Because of time constraints, performance levels for screened pupils have only been made available from one school and no information has been given about how these pupils were progressing prior to the screening as</p>

	14) ready with lines and squares and to keep on top of not running out'	a comparison. Although all pupils had made at least one progress level and many had made 2 or 3 in one term.
'One of our pupils now uses lilac paper which is really helped her confidence. When coloured paper isn't available she chooses to use a overlays as they really help with her reading and understanding.'	'In another school pupils had lost their overlays, and some had forgotten that they had overlays, so they hadn't been using them and were not able to reflect on the use of them.	It needs to be acknowledged that there is added planning and organisation needed when managing the needs of pupils in class.
'Behaviour has improved, ability to access lessons and focus has improved.'	Where paper was not available in the classroom pupils said that they often forgot to use it or that they didn't want to go and get some because it took too much time.	
'Great improvement across subjects. Some are more willing to engage in learning now.'		
'Confidence improved in lesson participation. Reading levels improved.'		
'Increased confidence, better engagement in reading, increased reading resilience.'		
'Children are more engaged in lessons more confident in reading and therefore behaviour is better.'		

'Better confidence.'		
'Presentation of work has improved their reading has become more fluent'		
<p>A SENCo from one school sent an email saying: 'I just wanted to share some positive news! Yesterday, we assessed a Y6 child screened and positive for Irlen on a reading fluency test. She didn't have her overlay as she'd left it at home and explained how much it helped her. She read 88 words per minute. We re-screened her today, as she'd brought her overlay back in, she read 132 words per minute. This was with the same member of staff, on a fluency assessment of the same level, just 24 hours later.</p> <p>It really highlights to me the impact the overlay has on the child's reading speed and accuracy'</p>		
'The parents have seen a marked improvement when reading at home'		
'One child has said that they like using the overlay'		
'They like using it and are happy'		
'one child said they can see much better in this colour this paper helps their reading'		
'Most children are very pleased with their overlays'		
'They feel better equipped to complete their writing'		



<p>'One pupil loves the glasses and it really helps him in everything he does. One pupil finds the lilac paper helps her sort her work out.'</p>		
<p>'Highly recommend to other schools'</p>		
<p>One teacher said 'I, personally, have been using an overlay for my migraines, and it has helped'</p>		
<p>In one group one child said how she had headaches, sore eyes, watery eyes and everything seemed blurry in bright light or on white paper. She had believed this was normal but realised that it wasn't normal once she had seen the difference with the overlay. Several of the other children in the group said they had had similar experiences and that they had also often had headaches at school. Two children who had already started using their tinted lenses said that they felt very different now. They were wearing them when I spoke to them, and they said that they make a big difference in the classroom when doing their work but also when walking in the corridors and going outside.</p>		
<p>In another group, children explained how 'words moved around on the page' but with their overlay they stopped moving around. One child said that words had 'got bigger' he elaborated by saying that the letters had doubled up so that words appeared to have more letters in them and then were difficult to read. The overlay stopped this.</p>		

<p>Many of the children said that they were now much happier reading, that they now enjoyed reading, and that the amount they read had increased. One saying that he always read 4 times a week as that was the school requirement but that he used to choose easy books and only read a page each time, he now chooses books with chapters and sometimes reads 2 or 3 chapters a night.</p>		
<p>There has been evidence of good practice. One class teacher who has 8 children with Irlen Syndrome in her class, all using different colours, has poly pockets hanging on the classroom wall which she keeps stocked with the different coloured paper needed. Pupils know that they can collect the paper whenever they need it. It is readily available in the classroom.</p>		