

# Concerned eye campaigners help protect pupils' pupils

**Evidence and advice from local eye health professionals in Essex, including the LOC, LEHN and a concerned school nurse convince commissioners to reconsider and to retain the primary school eye screening service.**

“ESSEX LOC RECOMMENDS THAT OTHER LOCS CONTACT THEIR COUNTY COUNCIL COMMISSIONERS TO INVESTIGATE WHAT PLANS MAY BE IN PLACE FOR SCHOOL SCREENING IN THEIR AREAS.”

Following a meeting between Essex LOC, the LEHN and a school nurse from Essex County Council it became apparent towards the end of 2015 that, in a bid to contribute towards a £12 million cost cutting exercise, the nurse-led school eye screening programme for reception age children was to cease.

The meeting had initially been called as a result of concerns the service had already been altered from an opt-out to an opt-in form, which had the potential to conceal negligence by a parent or carer.

The LOC along with the LEHN and school nurse launched a local campaign to save the service. The concerned eye health professionals contacted the Essex

County Council commissioner with responsibility for the service and gained support from the local Member of Parliament. They highlighted the potential damage that the decision to stop such a service could have.

The local eye health professionals specifically mentioned amblyopia and the consequences of uncorrected ametropia. The commissioner was receptive to the information provided by the LOC as well as others such as Thomson Software Solutions and the support of Sir Eric Pickles MP who got involved following a meeting organised by the Optical Confederation.

Following correspondence with all those involved, budget holders and health professionals, it was

agreed that more consideration was required regarding the future of the service. Essex LOC raised the issue in the early part of 2016 with the LEHN, which supported a proposal for further discussions and called for a formal meeting on the matter.

The meeting was chaired by the commissioner from Essex County Council and had representatives from the orthoptic departments as well as a paediatric consultant. As a direct result of the lobbying from this multidisciplinary team, the commissioner from Essex County Council agreed he now had sufficient evidence to overturn the initial decision to cut the service and reassure all those involved that nurse-led school eye screening in Essex would continue.

This whole process was initiated by a chance meeting. There is often a mistaken assumption by both practitioners and parents alike that these school nurse services are an inherent and established part of the education system.

Essex LOC recommends that other LOCS contact their county council commissioners to investigate what plans may be in place for school screening in their areas.

Our experience highlights that, unfortunately, with commissioners now under extreme pressure to make financial savings, they may see local eye care services as a quick and easy budget cut. However, when local eye health experts and local professionals provide appropriate, good-quality advice and recommendations, they can change minds and secure the health of our children.



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