

Does your child read clearly? New study to understand impact of children's 'under-focusing'

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Researchers at the University of Reading are asking parents' help for a new study which aims to see if children who 'under-focus' may experience more difficulty when learning at school.

Although most [children](#) are offered eye tests during their first year of school, only distance sight is examined. This is because screening is mainly looking for lazy eyes and large amounts of long or short sight which need early treatment. However few people realise that all children have to make extra effort to see clearly for close work, even if they don't need glasses.

Children who 'under-focus' will experience [blurred vision](#) when reading - but does that mean they find it harder to learn, to read and to concentrate? This new study, funded by Fight for Sight, aims to find out.

Dr Anna Horwood, from the University's School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences, is leading the study. She said: "I'm sure most parents would be surprised to learn that children's eyes are not tested during near work. Previous Reading research has found that even children who don't need glasses sometimes under-focus for close work, but they are unlikely to tell anyone because it is normal for them. As focusing is not part of the screening eye test for young children we don't know how common it is or how much under-focusing matters. Could it be affecting their educational development?"

"It may be quite normal for children to tolerate mild blur for all but the most detailed tasks. On the other hand under-focusing could be holding many back from engaging and concentrating on close work - we just don't know. We need children aged six and 10 for a preliminary study for wider research to see if identifying under-focusing children, and helping them to focus, can help them make the most of their education."

Volunteers would need to visit the University for about 1½ hours to look at different pictures as they come closer, and also do some simple eye, literacy and attention tests - all very child-friendly. In the next year, the researchers hope to roll the study out to some schools where more children will be tested.

Dr Horwood continued: "There is currently no evidence that treatment for under-focusing is necessary or that parents should be concerned. All children at state schools in Reading, Wokingham, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire are screened for known significant eye problems in their Reception year, but if your child spontaneously complains of blurred vision take them to an optometrist for a fuller eye test."

Provided by University of Reading

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