

GIVING YOUR CHILD EVERY CHANCE IN KINDERGARTEN

As parents, we all want our children to be happy at school. For the first few weeks, our little ones are “settling in” to their new environment, which includes making friends with children they have never met before, getting to know their teacher, remembering the many “rules” that all schools have, both in the classroom and the playground and adjusting to spending a full day every day at school. Most children adjust well to their new environment, but there will be some who may be left “floundering” for no apparent reason.

In addition to adjusting to the social environment, they also have to adjust to a new learning environment. As we all know, children learn at different rates and in different ways, and the teaching method used by the teacher may influence their learning. Other factors that can influence their learning include whether they can see the board clearly and/or whether they can hear the teacher’s instructions clearly.

In order to eliminate these two factors as possible deterrents to learning, it is wise to have their vision and hearing assessed before they begin school. Children who do have a vision problem or a hearing problem will not necessarily let you know: because they do not know they have a problem! They don’t know that they see or hear things differently from other children, so it is best not to rely on self-reporting for these important functions.

Another very important problem that could cause your child to have difficulties with learning is Irlen Syndrome, which is a visual processing problem. People with this problem are sensitive to white light, and are unable to process the whole spectrum of visible light. This makes it hard for them to read or write on white paper, and to copy from whiteboards and/or Smart boards. In some ways, this can be a bigger problem than vision or hearing problems, because Irlen Syndrome cannot be diagnosed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist. They can have perfect vision, yet still cannot see words clearly on a white background. Again, they will not self-report because they do not know that everyone does not see things as they do, so they usually struggle on and try and try but often cannot achieve the level of success that should come with their efforts.

Irlen Syndrome can cause distortions of print, including blurriness, movement or fading of words or letters, and words merging together or stretching away from each other. Often, parents will tell me that their child did report these distortions, but because they had been checked and found to have perfect vision, they did not really see how this could be happening. I have listed some things to look for in preschoolers or Kindergarten children who are not necessarily reading at that point.

Look for a reluctance to look at words on a white background but no problem looking at words on a coloured background or picture. Look for excessive squinting or blinking when doing schoolwork in bright light and see if this is less in a “duller” environment. For further information on Irlen Syndrome see www.irlendyslexia.com