

Free glasses to tackle poor eyesight and boost literacy

Thousands of pupils will benefit from an expanded programme that provides two free pairs of glasses to improve reading and writing by tackling poor eyesight.

[Data](#) shows that 30 per cent of pupils who need glasses have not been to an optician, alongside disadvantaged children being less likely to get, or wear, the glasses they need. This can hold children back.

The 'Glasses in Classes' scheme aims to level up outcomes and will be adapted for five disadvantaged areas in England, under the [Opportunity Area](#) programme. This will reach more than 9,000 pupils in at least 225 schools.

Children identified as needing glasses will receive one pair for home and one for school, helping them concentrate in the classroom and improve their literacy skills.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

As a young boy shortly after arriving in this country, I sat at the back of the classroom with poor language skills and low confidence, struggling to engage with my lessons.

Back then, I could never have dreamt of the opportunities this country would give me and I am determined to help every young person overcome obstacles, just as I was supported.

Too many children still struggle with the literacy skills they need to make the most of their education. Simple steps like providing free glasses to those that need them so they can clearly see words on a page, for example, can help close the literacy gap and foster a love of learning.

Children and their families will receive support from a vision co-ordinator, usually a teaching assistant, to attend follow-up eye examinations, get their prescription glasses and wear them regularly. Training will be available for support staff.

Marking National Eye Health Week (20 to 26 September), the scheme is backed by Opportunity Area funding and will now be available for pupils in Doncaster, Derby, Durham, Norwich and Breckland, and North Yorkshire Coast.

The 'Glasses in Classes' project was developed by the Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER), a partnership created by Bradford Opportunity Area to remove health barriers to learning.

It was expanded across the city in 2019 using Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) funding to include 100 primary schools, of which half received the intervention, to further investigate the effect on literacy attainment of providing additional glasses for use in school.

This latest expansion aims to support other areas facing similar challenges and to close the attainment gap that persists between some children and their more affluent peers, despite it narrowing at every stage of education since 2011 up until the pandemic.

It builds on the Government's ambitious, long-term education recovery plan, including investment of more than £3 billion to date, and the extension of the Opportunity Area programme to a fifth year.

Schools do not usually get the results of vision screenings that pupils take in reception class but, during the pilot, these results were shared with staff in schools so they knew which pupils and families to support. Children are already entitled to free NHS sight tests and vouchers to help with the cost of glasses, but this trial gives them two pairs for free.

At the start of the Opportunity Area programme in 2017, pupils in Bradford were 6.2 percentage points behind the national average in reading at Key Stage 2. That gap narrowed almost a third to 4.6 percentage points in 2018 and halved to 3.1 percentage points in 2019.

Other studies have shown that vision improved for children who wear their glasses compared to those who do not and there is a link between poor eyesight and reduced literacy scores.

Local partners will work together to adapt the 'Glasses in Classes' approach to meet local need in the five areas as part of the Opportunity Area's place-based approach to levelling up.

'Glasses in Classes' features in the Opportunity Area's health and education [insight guide](#) showcasing a selection of interventions covering mental health and wellbeing and early identification of autism.

The CAER partnership includes the Department for Education, Bradford Teaching Hospital NHS Trust, the Universities of Leeds, Bradford and York, the City of Bradford Metropolitan Council, and the Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF).