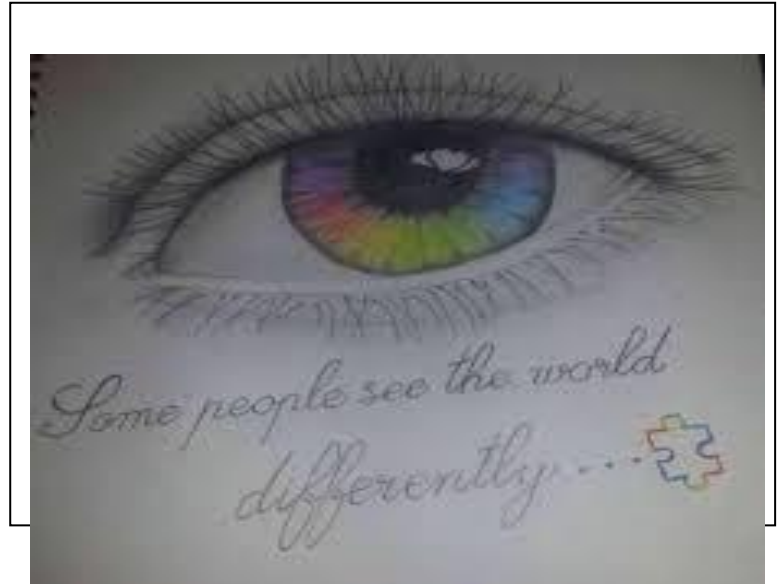


SEND Bulletin NO. 14



Meares-Irlen Syndrome

Meares-Irlen syndrome is a condition first recognised in 1980. Olive Meares, a teacher in New Zealand, provided details of how spatial distortions affected text for some readers. She reported that these distortions could be reduced by the use of coloured plastic overlays.

Helen Irlen, a psychologist, also described similar symptoms. She named the effect scotopic sensitivity and, like Meares, reported that the distortions could be reduced by the use of coloured filters or overlays.

Meares-Irlen syndrome is not an optical problem but a problem with the way that the brain processes visual information. It is estimated that between twelve and fifteen per cent of the population are affected by this syndrome. Trained orthoptists can test for visual perception difficulties and identify which coloured filter (overlay or spectacles) can alleviate the symptoms. These symptoms vary greatly from person to person so it is important to have a thorough assessment by a trained and qualified Irlen diagnostician.

Key characteristics

Pupils with Meares-Irlen syndrome may:

- have problems with spatial awareness
- experience some difficulties associated with dyslexia
- find reading difficult because of distortions of print
- experience sensitivity to light
- suffer with headaches and/or tired and sore eyes
- have difficulty taking in visual information
- have problems looking at a computer screen
- sometimes feel a kind of motion sickness
- have problems with fluorescent lights
- need to be careful when involved in activities requiring judgement of heights and distances.

Support strategies

You may need to:

- ensure that parents are aware of the problem and are seeking advice
- organise classroom seating so that the pupil is not experiencing light glare
- allow the pupil breaks from taking in too much visual information at a time
- ensure the pupil uses overlays or wears the spectacles provided when involved in any activity requiring concentrated visual attention
- be aware of perceptual difficulties experienced by the pupil in PE, games and orienteering activities (judging position, direction, height and distance)
- practise tracking activities (mazes, dot-to-dot, tracing, letter shapes, etc)
- use multi-sensory methods to support the pupil's learning
- create a positive reading environment with opportunities to listen to texts
- help the pupil organise his written work by using writing frames
- raise self-esteem and confidence with lots of praise and encouragement.

Support agencies

- Irlen ABC (Accuracy by Colour): www.irlenabc.f9.co.uk
- Irlen Institute (USA): www.irlen.com
- Irlen UK: www.irlenuk.com

If you have any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin please e-mail them to me:

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Many thanks

Anne