Good vision is important for a child's ability to learn efficiently, their physical and social development and to help them reach their full learning potential. Children rarely complain of visual difficulties and may not realize their sight is impaired.

Along with allergies and asthma, eye disorders are the most common long-term health problems experienced by children. In a recent school study conducted by the Australian College of Optometry, 30% of the children had a significant vision problem.

Parents and teachers play a key role in recognising the signs of a vision problem, as well as helping children to look after their eyes.

Early detection allows for intervention and correction. If unaddressed, visual problems can impact on a child's academic performance and may lead to permanent vision impairment.

**Teachers and parents should watch for the following signs, which may indicate a visual problem:**

- Squinting
- One eye turns, while the other is straight
- Tilting the head
- Difficulty recognising familiar people in the distance
- Headaches
- Blurred or double vision
- Eye rubbing and frequent blinking
- Variable or odd viewing distances (i.e. sits too close to the TV)
- Holding a book very close
- Performance that worsens with time spent on a task (difficulty concentrating)
- Poor hand-eye coordination
- Covering or closing one eye
- Difficulty learning to read
-Leaving out or confusing words when reading

The most common vision problems experienced by school-aged children are those affecting the ability to see clearly and sharply. These include:

- Myopia (affects distance vision)
- Hyperopia (can affect distance and near vision)
- Astigmatism (can affect distance and near vision)
- Accommodation and vergence (effects focussing and eye control)
- Amblyopia (lazy eye)
- Strabismus (eye turn)

An optometrist is best placed to assess a child's vision and diagnose a visual problem. Once diagnosed, these problems are usually easy to correct. Other vision problems, such as a turned or lazy eyes may be more difficult to detect, and require treatment by an experienced paediatric optometrist. Early detection is the key.
When should a child get their eyes tested?
Optometrists Association Australia recommends that children have a full eye examination with an optometrist before starting school and regularly as they progress through primary and secondary school. A thorough eye examination with an optometrist takes approximately 25 minutes and attracts a Medicare rebate.

What can you do at school and home
- Classrooms and home study areas should have good and even lighting
- Encourage appropriate (knuckle-to-eye) working distances when reading, using the computer or watching TV
- Limit near work (eg reading or computer work) sessions to less than one hour at a time
- Minimise reflections from the monitor and other surfaces
- The top of the computer monitor should be approximately at or slightly below eye level
- Ensure sunglasses and a hat are worn when outdoors to reduce UV exposure to the eyes
- Appropriate protective eyewear should always be worn when playing sport

Australian College of Optometry
The Australian College of Optometry (ACO), based in Carlton, offers primary and specialist paediatric services.

The Australian College of Optometry primary care service is a paediatric general eye and vision check for children without a specific referral. Children will undergo a comprehensive examination including:
- Vision assessment
- Refraction
- Eye movement assessment
- Binocular vision assessment
- Ocular health assessment

Specialist services are provided when the optometrist identifies a specific problem. Alternatively referrals are encouraged from professionals who are part of the vision, health, developmental or educational care of that child.

Specialist services include diagnostic assessment and management of strabismus, amblyopia, binocular vision problems and developmental visual information processing. The ACO clinic also provides assessment and management of children with developmental delays, learning difficulties or specific medical conditions.

The emphasis of the specialist services is on a multi-disciplinary approach to care. Vision problems identified will be treated in consultation with the referring professional.

Who can attend?
All Victorian children under the age of 18 are eligible to attend. ACO provides affordable glasses for all patients and those eligible for government concessions will receive further discount.

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Hours of access
8.30am – 5.45pm Monday to Friday
8.30am – 5.00pm Saturday