

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION
BY DEPUTY R.J. WARD OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 17th NOVEMBER 2020**

Question

Following the increase in online teaching in response to Covid-19, and the possible effect on children's eyesight, will the Minister state –

- (a) what provision, if any, is in place, or planned, to assist families who may need more regular eye tests or to meet the needs for changes to prescription glasses; and
- (b) what work, if any, is being undertaken to monitor the effects on eye health as a result of the change in delivery of education?

Answer

- (a) Families who are on a low-income can apply for the Income Support benefit. Income Support has provisions for families to apply for special payments towards certain medical expenses, including grants towards the cost of glasses.

The guidelines used within Income Support recognise that specialist glasses are more expensive, and that children may need help more often. This means that the household can apply for a special payment grant in respect of glasses for a child up to once a year, and extra payments towards specialist lenses will be considered.

From January 2021, EYECAN., a local charity that supports sight impaired Islanders in Jersey (previously known as the Jersey Blind Society), will be trialling a year-long voucher scheme funding up to £90 towards the cost of new glasses for Island children under 8 years old.

<http://www.eyecan.je/voucher-scheme/>

Parents and carers will be able to claim one EYECAN voucher per child by simply providing their optician with their child's Jersey registration number. The scheme will be trialled throughout 2021 before being reviewed.

- (b) Paediatrics is not running specific or targeted programmes in relation to eye care for children as a response to changes in delivery of education. However, during routine clinic consultations and in ward rounds the Paediatric doctors screen children for common vision disorders and diet advice is given to include all essential vitamins to maintain eye health. If parents are worried about increased screen time usage and raise the issue with doctors in the department, appropriate advice is given to the families to negotiate screen time limits with their children based upon the needs of their children, the ways in which screens are used, and the degree to which use of screens appear to displace (or not) physical and social activities and sleep.