



## Irlen Syndrome – A teacher Resource

*Teachers are in the best position to identify children who are struggling with reading. However, many children who are struggling to read have either average or above average intelligence and achieve in all academic areas other than reading. This leads to frustration, both on the part of the teacher and the student because there does not seem to be any reason for this difficulty.*



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For further information go to [www.irlen.com](http://www.irlen.com)

*If a child has Irlen Syndrome and it is not identified, they can suffer from low self-esteem, self-confidence and a gradual belief that they are “stupid” or “dumb”. After a while, they give up and that is when they start to withdraw from the educational experience. In turn, this often results in behavioural problems that exacerbate the learning difficulties they are experiencing.*

*Teachers can help by looking for the signs of Irlen Syndrome and asking a few simple questions.*

### Teachers may notice:

- The child squirms as they read. Often changing the direction of their head or the book.
- The child seems to overlook words as they read, skipping them either partially or entirely.
- As they read, the child, makes two words into one, i.e. 'they were' becomes 'there'
- Child may squint or move closer to the book in an effort to see the word.
- The child adds words to their reading, or changes the words to others that mean the same, but are completely different.
- The child looks away from the words frequently as they read. This is an effort to refocus and stop the movement of the words.
- Reading becomes more difficult as the child reads. At first seeming easy or natural, but as the page progresses the fluidity is lost.



## How to check if a student may need screening for Irlen Syndrome:

If an individual answers yes to 3 or more of the following questions, there is a good chance that they are affected by Irlen Syndrome, and they should be tested by a qualified Irlen Screener. (see contact details on the back)

In the screening, he/she will find out for certain if they are affected, determine their level of severity, and learn about treatment.

- Do you skip words or lines while reading?
- Do you lose your place or reread lines?
- Does reading make you tired?
- Do you need to take frequent breaks while reading?
- Do you find yourself blinking or squinting when you read?
- Do your eyes hurt, or get watery or dry when reading?
- Do you prefer to read in dim light?
- Do you find your head moves closer to the page as you read?
- Do you use your finger or a marker to help you read?
- Does reading get harder the longer you do it?
- Do you get restless or fidgety when reading?
- Are you easily distracted when you read?
- Do you find it hard to remember what you have just read?
- Do you try to avoid reading?

### Other signs of Irlen Syndrome include:

- Words appear blurry, or appear to shift on the page
- You are bothered by bright, glossy paper when reading
- You develop a headache or nausea during or after reading
- You have trouble copying from the board or produce unequal spacing when writing
- You have problems with depth perception, e.g. catching balls, determining distances when driving
- You have difficulty with headlights and streetlights at night

Contact: [empoweredlearning@xtra.co.nz](mailto:empoweredlearning@xtra.co.nz) for a screening

## How Teachers can help:

- If a child has **corrective lenses**, encourage them in a positive manner to wear them regularly in class.
- **Discourage negative attitudes and comments of other students.** Encourage open discussion about Irlen Syndrome.
- **Reduce your fluorescent lighting** by creating areas that do not have fluorescent lights, areas where half the lights are off, and areas with full fluorescent lighting. If you have a room with enough natural lighting, do not turn on your fluorescent lights.
- **Accessible teaching materials:**
  - **Use at least size 11 font or larger**
  - **Use sans serif font**
  - **Space sections and lines well**
  - **Bullets and numbers are easier to read than continuous prose**
  - **Do not use poor quality photocopies**
  - **Use flow charts and diagrams to illustrate points**
  - **Avoid using bright white paper**
- **Chalkboards.** Write in columns rather than across the board. Write each paragraph in different colours to help with tracking. And whenever possible do not use white boards. The white boards are available in brown or grey which is much easier for readability.
- **Copying.** Avoid requiring the student to copy from the whiteboard/chalkboard. Allow children to copy from paper to paper. If necessary, copying what has already been copied from a board by another child, if possible onto coloured paper
- **Computer screens** – can be problematic. You can install “screen tinter lite” which is free software that allows the student to colour the background of Microsoft Office documents. Screen brightness can also be turned down.
- **Hats or Visors.** Let your students wear hats with dark under-brims in the classroom. This reduces the glare from the fluorescent lighting.
- **Book Position.** Reading should be done from materials placed directly in front of the child. Children should not attempt to ‘share’ reading material.
- **Coloured Overlays.** Encourage and remind children to use the coloured overlay(s) in all subject areas in which reading occurs including Mathematics.
- **Overhead and PowerPoint presentations** - minimise the use of overhead projectors and use coloured backgrounds without unnecessary graphics.