

Josh soldiering on thanks to wooden toys



TOY soldiers lovingly made by a devoted dad are helping a little boy with sight problems.

Josh New had struggled to read and write as he found it difficult to focus on the words on a page.

The six-year-old, of Whitley Bay, had struggled to keep up with his classmates at Appletree Gardens First School in Monkseaton until he was diagnosed with binocular instability.

The youngster's parents were so concerned that their son was lacking in concentration and complained of "words flying off the page" that Josh was taken to Keyes Opticians in Gosforth, Newcastle, where it was discovered he had the disorder.

To help his son improve his eye muscle co-ordination, his dad Sean spent time making a row of wooden soldier pegs – all of different colours, faces and heights – that Josh focuses on for at least five minutes a day.

That, combined with regular eye exercises supplied by optician Andrew Keyes, has enabled Josh's vision to improve dramatically. He is now enjoying his reading and his writing is much better.

Sean, 40, said: "It is important that Josh focuses on something each day and because he is only young I decided to make the wooden peg soldiers for him to look at as I thought it would be fun.

"The reaction I received from Josh was great. He does his exercises and makes sure he focuses on the soldiers. Josh has coped well with his condition and is making great progress."

Josh with his mam Joanne and dad Sean

Binocular instability is often linked to dyslexia and Josh, who has three brothers – twins Alfie and Toby, seven-months, and Jamie, 17 – will undergo tests to see if he has the condition.

The youngster is known to also have visual stress.

His mam Joanne, 37, who works with children with special needs, said: "We are absolutely thrilled to see a huge change in Josh. His reading has come on in leaps and bounds.

"Where every word had previously been a struggle, he is beginning to really enjoy his reading and he's getting excellent school reports.

"His writing, which used to be all over the place, is now so much neater."

Optician Andrew said: "Visual stress and eye focusing problems are particularly common in dyslexia and by treating visual problems, remaining difficulties can become much easier to manage.

"Eye exercises can help improve eye muscle co-ordination and coloured filters can be used to help visual processing."

One in five people suffer from some degree of visual stress, also known as Meares-Irlen syndrome. Effects include losing your place or skipping words or lines, poor concentration, difficulties learning to read or write, print blurring and tiredness when reading.

Liz Ferguson, from dyslexia North East, said: "Visual stress can affect up to 50% of children and adults with dyslexia, and whether they have dyslexia or not, interferes with the visual process of reading and writing. Giving the right kind of help to someone will make a huge difference to their life."