Occupational Therapy – Explanation of Screening Test

Core Strength
This area is assessed in the session by observing the child’s general posture during all activities. Indicators such as whether they rest their head on their hand, they slumped over when sitting or swinging on their chair can indicate factors relating to posture. Core strength is tested through two assessment items where the child is asked to assume a “superman posture” and a “meatball posture”. How long they can maintain these positions are key indicators for core strength. Core strength and postural stability are very important for a child’s success in the classroom and playground. With limited core strength children may find it:
   - Difficult to engage in the playground,
   - Difficult to sit for extended periods (is desk work or mat time)
   - Affects their attention and concentration and tire easily impacting in key learning opportunities

Proprioception
This area is assessed through several assessment items. Observations of how their hold their body, manipulate items or their body pencil can indicate a lot relating to proprioception and consequently joint stability. Shoulder stability in particular is very important to achieve in order for a child to become an efficient and fluent writer, as it is a precursor to fine motor skills

Oculomotor
This area is assessed by having the child maintain their visual focus on a moving target. Convergence is assessed by holding a target about 30cm away from their face and then having the target move into toward their nose. Visual tracking is assessed by moving the target into all four quadrants of their visual field. Observations are made as to whether the child can isolate their eye movements from head or whole body movements. If they eyes work in tandem and function together is also observed, and other aspects such as eyes watering, fatiguing or the student reporting they are “sore.” This item is often used as a point of referral onto a developmental optometrist to identify if the difficulties are associated with visual acuity.

Motor Planning
This is assessed through general observation in the session as well as how the child can imitate body postures of the assessor, copy a block construction and copy shapes using pencil and paper. Motor planning is a key aspect of gross motor skills, as well as fine motor skills including writing. Difficulties with motor planning skills, can greatly impact on a child’s ability to learn how to write letters correctly and later on in primary school can also impact on writing speed, and hence over have a significant impact on work productivity and output.

Fine Motor Skills
Fine motor skills are very complex, however in the kindy screening tool, observations are made of how the child uses their hands and fingers in simple fine motor games. Primarily observations are made as to whether the child uses their whole hand for an activity or whether they are able to isolate a pincer grip for manipulating small objects. How they hold their wrist and move objects within their hands and with what strength they use is also observed.

Fine motor skills are critical skills to develop for the efficient use of tools in the classroom such as pencils and scissors and later on keyboards and musical instruments, but also in self care activities at home such as dressing with buttons and zippers and tying shoelaces.

Pre writing skills
Pre writing skills reflect the abilities of a child to manipulate a pencil and use it to produce meaningful marks on paper. In the assessment observations are made relating to drawing skills and early writing skills, namely the ability to copy shapes and marks in a correct fashion. These skills are useful to observe as it indicates where a child will need assistance with early writing in the classroom. During the assessment observations are also made of the child’s ability to use both sides of their body together and whether the child has developed a dominant hand, whether they are able to cross the midline of their body are also relating to bilateral integration skills. This is especially important for writing with the development of a dominant hand and using a helping hand to stabilise a piece of paper for cutting or writing.