

Literacy and Dyslexia Guidance

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Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to provide clarity to schools about the effective assessment and teaching of children and young people with literacy difficulties.

Literacy skills are a key foundation from which many educational opportunities arise and develop. Any student who has difficulty with reading, writing and spelling skills is likely to have difficulty in making the most of education.

Children learn to read and write at different speeds. However, there are some children who experience ongoing and persistent difficulties with these skills, despite the teaching and support they receive. As with any area of need, literacy difficulties lie on a continuum. Some students may have relatively mild difficulties, whilst others may be significantly and severely affected.

The position of Cumberland Psychological Service is that *all* students who experience difficulties with developing literacy skills should have access to high quality, evidence-based interventions to accelerate their development relative to their previous performance. Support should be based on level of need, rather than any diagnostic label.

Literacy Difficulties and Dyslexia

There is ongoing debate about the use of the term 'dyslexia' to describe children with persistent literacy difficulties. There is a consensus that biologically based reading difficulties exist, but there are many descriptions and definitions of what dyslexia is.

The British Psychological Society (2009) defines dyslexia as follows:

- *Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty...despite appropriate learning opportunities.*

The British Dyslexia Association adopts the Rose (2009) definition:

- *Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory, and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category and there are no clear cut off points. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor coordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.*

The criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V) include the following elements:

- *affected academic skills are substantially and quantifiably below those expected for the individual's chronological age, and cause significant interference with academic or occupational performance, or with activities of daily living.*
- *have persisted for at least 6 months, despite the provision of interventions that target those difficulties.*
- *are not better accounted for by intellectual disabilities, uncorrected visual or auditory acuity, other mental or neurological disorders, psychosocial adversity, lack of proficiency in the language of academic instruction, or inadequate educational instruction.*

The varying descriptions of dyslexic difficulties have some common elements:

- Difficulties can occur across a range of intellectual abilities. It is not necessary for there to be a discrepancy between a person's general abilities and their literacy skills for them to be viewed as dyslexic.
- The persistence of a person's literacy difficulties is a defining feature.
- Dyslexia lies on a continuum, with no clear consensus about the 'cut off' needed.

Literacy difficulties arise for many different reasons. A model assuming one 'main cause' for dyslexia is simplistic. Dyslexia is perhaps best thought of as an umbrella term that indicates that a child has persistent difficulties with literacy, whilst acknowledging that the exact nature of the difficulties may vary from one student to another.

Successful Interventions

Appropriately supported quality first teaching will address the needs of most students with additional literacy needs. Teaching should be delivered by skilled staff who can continually adapt and tailor teaching to students' skills.

Any literacy difficulty needs to be identified as early as possible so children and young people can receive the support they need when they need it.

All teaching staff need to be informed of up-to-date theory, research and practice to enable them to meet the needs of all children and young people with literacy difficulties.

Good quality assessment informs targets and approaches.

Intervention for pupils with literacy difficulties should be multi-tiered, increasing in intensity for those pupils with persistent difficulties. Students' responses to earlier, less intensive forms of intervention will help to determine what future interventions are necessary, following an 'assess, plan, do, review' format.

All educational interventions should be evidence-based. There is no research evidence to show that children with dyslexia should receive different intervention compared with other children with literacy difficulties.

Children and young people's literacy needs are best met when schools and parents/carers work in partnership, in line with the SEND Code of Practice.

Selecting an Intervention

The 2021 'Reading Framework' from the Department for Education states that children with literacy difficulties should have *additional* small group or individual practice which:

- takes place in a quiet place, at a regular time every day so that the children become familiar with the routine.
- is a school priority, with efforts made to avoid disruption or cancellation.
- is provided by a well-trained adult: teacher or teaching assistant.
- uses an evidence-based approach.
- includes activities that secure the phonic knowledge a child needs to learn.

A review of possible evidence-based interventions is available at
[What Works 5th Edition](#)

Schools could choose to use commercially available schemes of intervention, or could develop interventions using the principles below. For effective intervention schools should:

- Complete detailed assessments of children's literacy skills. These assessments typically measure phonological awareness, phonic knowledge, letter knowledge, knowledge of common exception words, text reading accuracy, reading fluency, reading comprehension, spelling, and writing, and help the teacher to identify the specific areas of literacy that require improvement.
- Analyse and use assessments to develop a programme of intervention.
- Teach more frequently occurring skills before less useful skills.
- Introduce new learning only after previous knowledge has been mastered.
- Use interleaved learning where new skills are mixed with previous learning.
- Consider using a 'model-lead-test' teaching method ('my turn, together, your turn') teaching approach to introduce and practise skills. This is useful when teaching new skills or correcting errors.
- Use distributed practice, (i.e., short, frequent teaching sessions) as this is more effective than longer sessions of input.
- Focus on fluency at each stage of the programme to ensure automatic and accurate recognition and writing of words. Provide opportunities to read known words at speed. Encourage re-reading of texts.
- Teach to generalisation so skills can be applied in different contexts.
- Match reading materials carefully to children's level of skill.

Schools may find 'Precision Teaching' a useful tool to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching strategies that they are using. 'Precision Teaching' can also be helpful for 'probing' the accuracy and fluency of a particular skill.

Vocabulary knowledge and language skills play an important role in the reading process. Research shows that the explicit teaching of vocabulary and language skills is important for literacy development.

All interventions should take place in the context of access to good quality literature, and teaching staff who aim to increase the enjoyment of reading.

There is no evidence that interventions such as computerised memory and 'brain' training are effective in improving literacy skills. Other approaches, such as targeting visual processing through use of coloured lenses, or using physical movement training exercises, are not supported by evidence.

Multi-sensory teaching is sometimes referred to as a core feature of specialist literacy intervention. Children use their hearing, vision and touch when learning to read and write. Beyond the general use of such activities as part of an overall educational programme, research does not indicate the use of specific multi-sensory approaches as key to improving literacy skills. Multi-sensory learning can however make learning more fun for children, particularly if they are struggling to keep motivated.

Access to the Curriculum

Children and young people with additional literacy needs can experience difficulties in accessing wider aspects of the school curriculum, as they find it harder to read teaching materials and to make a record of their work.

Teachers will need to modify the ways in which the curriculum is presented, and expectations linked to recording to take account of these needs.

Possible ways of modifying the curriculum are included in a diagram available via the link at the end of the document. Many of these approaches form part of what has been described as 'Dyslexia Friendly Teaching'.

There are many forms of Assistive Technology available to support learners with additional literacy needs. To become successful and confident, learners will need explicit *teaching* in the use of these different technologies and opportunities to apply them in a wide variety of contexts.

Some learners can be a little hesitant about using technology, as they are concerned about appearing 'different'. Introducing technology as part of a smaller group and making it part of the usual way of working for some/all students can help to address these worries.

Guidance regarding assistive technology can be found via the link at the end of the document.

Self-Esteem and Motivation

The emotional well-being and confidence of children and young people with additional literacy needs should always be at the forefront of both class-based support and intervention planning. This should be done by:

- Involving the child/young person in the planning of the additional support.
- Ensuring that they are fully informed about the purpose of the support and their rate of progress.
- Promoting a Growth Mindset where ability is seen as malleable, influenced by effort and current performance is compared to previous skills.
- Matching learning and book choices carefully to skill levels to maximise feelings of success.
- Ensuring access to the wider curriculum using appropriate curriculum adaptations and assistive technologies.
- Enabling access to motivating real books and literature of their choice.

Exam Access Arrangements

Children with additional literacy needs may be entitled to arrangements such as the provision of additional time, a reader, or a scribe in external examinations. It is also possible to use an electronic 'reading pen' in some situations. Exam boards publish criteria for accessing these arrangements, which are based on level of need. It is not necessary for a student to be labelled 'dyslexic' in order to access these supports.

Schools make an application to the relevant examining body for additional arrangements. In some cases, additional evidence is required from a qualified external assessor to support the request.

Support from the Educational Psychology Service

Cumberland Educational Psychology Service can support schools by:

- Providing training for schools and other settings in relation to children with literacy needs/dyslexia.
- Supporting the development of whole school policy and approaches to additional literacy needs.

- Helping schools to identify relevant assessment tools and interpret the results of these.
- Supporting schools to identify and evaluate evidence-based approaches to intervention.
- Consulting with schools to refine inputs during the 'assess, plan, do review' framework for groups and individuals.
- Consulting with schools about strategies to support curricular access.
- Consultation and assessment work with individual children whose progress continues to cause significant concern, despite extensive individualised teaching within the 'assess, plan, do, review' framework'.

Children and young people could be described as having dyslexic difficulties if they have significant and persistent literacy difficulties, in accordance with a recognised and published definition.

Schools should use regular planning meetings with their named Educational Psychologist to negotiate appropriate involvements.

Education, Health and Care Plans

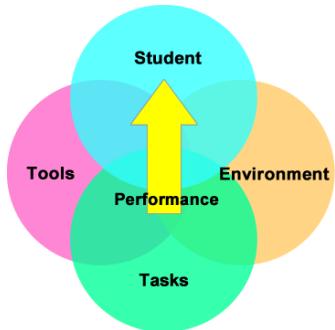
In the vast majority of cases, it will not be necessary for students with literacy difficulties to be supported via an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). All schools have delegated resources for Special Educational Needs which can be used to meet needs.

Cumberland Council publishes criteria to guide decision making about when to issue an EHCP plan. These are available online.

Assistive Technology

There are many forms of Assistive Technology available to support learners with additional literacy needs. Technology is rapidly evolving so knowing what's available can seem a little overwhelming for young people and the staff working with them. To become successful and confident, learners will need explicit *teaching* in the use of these different technologies and opportunities to apply them in a wide variety of contexts. Different technologies will work for some learners but not so well for others.

The Student, Environment, Tasks, Tools (SETT) approach is one way of deciding what might be helpful. (Joy Zabala)



- consider the capabilities of the individual **Student**
- the **Environment** in which they are working
- the **Tasks** they are needing to carry out
- before selecting **Tools**.

Ideally SETT should be a collaborative decision-making process, including the teacher, support for learning teacher, parent and pupil (and/or significant others)

Many commonly used programmes now have accessibility features 'built in' without any additional cost implication, beyond providing a laptop/iPad. Areas to consider as part of an 'Assistive Tech' curriculum might include:

To support reading:

- Highlighting and 'reading aloud' unknown individual words in documents (e.g. in Word, PowerPoint, Excel)
- Using a screen reader for entire 'Word' (or other 'Office suite') documents
- Using a screen reader for PDF documents or webpages
- Use of reading/scanning pens, if available e.g., C-Reader Pen
- Using accessibility features such as font size, colour and contrast
- Using Audio Books – in a format available to the student e.g., Kindle
- Using the Cumbria Library BorrowBox App to access audio content.

To support spelling and writing:

- Using Voice assistants (Siri, Google, Alexa) to check spelling of individual words.
- Using built-in spelling and grammar checkers to edit documents.

- Using 'voice to text' to send short messages such as texts and emails (in a format available to the student)
- Using 'voice to text' to create sentences and paragraphs in Word.
- Using voice to search the internet.
- Creating audio and video files as an alternative to producing written text.
- Use of planning tools such as mind mapping and graphic organisers to organise longer pieces of written work.
- Use of 'bespoke' programmes such as 'Clicker', 'ClaroRead' or 'Dragon Dictate' when appropriate.

Some learners can be a little hesitant about using technology as they are concerned about appearing 'different'. Introducing technology as part of a smaller group and making it part of the usual way of working for some/all students can help to address these worries.

Additional Information

A selection of resources which schools may find useful when supporting children with additional literacy needs can be found in the Professional's Hub on the Cumberland Local Offer.

These include guidance on:

- Assessing reading and spelling skills using resources from Staffordshire Educational Psychology Service: shared with kind permission.
- Evidence based interventions: an overview table.
- Precision Teaching overview
- Using assistive technology to support literacy skills including links to a wide range of 'how to...' resource to develop teacher skills and knowledge.
- Supporting curriculum access via alternatives to writing tasks
- Using 'Paired Reading' to support reading development.

Assistive Technology Links

For a general overview and evaluation of different assistive technologies:

[EdTech Demonstrator Link](#)

This website is huge – pick the area you are interested in!

Reading

- [Individual Words in Microsoft](#)
- [Read aloud entire document in Microsoft](#)
- [Screen Reader for PDF](#)
- [Screen Reader for Webpages](#)
- [Scanning Pens](#) Other models of reading pen are available
- [AudioBooks: How to Activate Voice on Kindle: 8 Steps - wikiHow](#)
- [Cumberland Libraries free eBooks and eAudiobooks](#)

Writing and Spelling

- [Ideas for using Siri or other voice assistants](#) (can also use to check spelling of individual words)
- [An introduction to using voice to text in 'Word'](#)
- [Voice Search for Chrome](#)
- [Voice search for Edge](#)
- [Alternatives to written recording](#)
- [Creating typable PDF documents/worksheets that can be completed without the need to copy information into books or handwrite responses](#)
- [Mind Maps: Ayoa MindMaps for Kids on the App Store or Inspiration 10 Concept Mapping and Mind Mapping](#)

Other Websites and Information

- [Clicker - Literacy Software | Crick Software](#)
- [DocsPlus - Educational Software | Crick Software](#)
- [Widgit Online](#)
- [ClaroRead Windows - Text to Speech Software - Claro Software](#)
- [Dragon Speech Recognition Software and Solutions | Nuance](#)
- [The Dyslexia Shop](#)
- [Inclusive Technology | Software | Dyslexia Software](#)
- [Call Scotland](#)