

A staff guide to

# Dyslexia



Education Resources

## **Dear colleague,**

"Education for learners with dyslexia" (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2008) highlighted examples of good practice in supporting children and young people with dyslexia across Scotland.

It also encouraged debate around an agreed definition of dyslexia. The following working definition has been developed by the Scottish Government:

"Dyslexia can be described as a continuum of difficulties in learning to read, write and/or spell which persist despite the provision of appropriate learning opportunities. These difficulties do not reflect an individual's cognitive abilities and may not be typical of performance in other areas."

This booklet has been prepared jointly by Psychological Services staff and Inclusion Coordinators in South Lanarkshire Council. It is intended to help education staff support children and young people who may be dyslexic.

**Andrea Batchelor**  
Head of Education (Inclusion)

# What is dyslexia?

Most children learn to read easily if they attend school regularly, are taught using a systematic and progressive phonics-based programme in the early stages, and have a supportive background.

However, for some children, the development of literacy is more of a challenge. Some of these pupils are identified as having dyslexic difficulties.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which can result in significant, persistent problems in learning to read and spell. There are a number of theories about causes, but in terms of learning behaviour it means that children find it difficult to decode the sounds and shapes of letters and words accurately and fluently. These are core skills that form the basis of reading ability. Problems in this area can cause difficulties in comprehension. This can then further slow down progress in reading, writing and spelling activities. This cycle of events can of course lead to the child being further 'put off' attempting literacy activities, because they find them hard.

Some children learn to decode sounds and letters normally, but nevertheless have difficulties with comprehension, and need strategies and support aimed at tackling this difficulty. This may be an indication of difficulties with the processing of language. However, this is not dyslexia.

As reading, writing and spelling are such important skills in education, dyslexia is the most commonly identified kind of specific learning difficulty, but children can have specific difficulties in other areas - for example with maths, language or spatial awareness.

## How common is it?

Statistics vary as to the prevalence of dyslexia amongst children and young people. This is partly because dyslexia is best described as a continuum with no clear cut-offs: there is a wide range in the degree and severity and the learning profiles of those affected. Figures range from 4% to 15% or above, implying that there is likely to be at least one child affected in each class.

## Is dyslexia the same for all pupils?

Difficulties may occur in relation to reading fluency and/or accuracy, and often also in spelling, but the range, nature and severity of the difficulties will be different in individual pupils.

Dyslexic difficulties can occur across all ability levels and socio-economic groupings. They are often easier to identify in more able children, particularly those with greater ability in oral language, because there is usually a greater difference between their specific difficulty and their general ability e.g. in language or maths.

Equally, dyslexic type difficulties may be more easily missed in a less able child - yet such a child will need the same kind of support in order to tackle the dyslexic features of their learning difficulties.

Some children may find that appropriate intervention and support can, over a period of time, enable them to reach a stage where their skills become good enough for them to be able to work and progress reasonably independently. Others may require longer term interventions.

Some pupils will continue to require a degree of support in one way or another for the whole of their time in education, for example with spelling, or extended writing. In addition to general ability level, pupils may experience differences in other ways:

- ▶ differing individual learning profiles
- ▶ the effect of past educational experience
- ▶ type and level of family support
- ▶ individual strengths
- ▶ temperament
- ▶ motivation to learn
- ▶ confidence in learning ability
- ▶ self-esteem
- ▶ relationships with peers/teachers.

## What can be done?

### How can we help?

As the difficulties experienced are believed to be developmental, there is no 'miracle cure'. However, studies show that targeted interventions and learning experiences can be very effective in improving literacy skills for all pupils with literacy difficulties, including dyslexic pupils.

As is the case with all pupils with additional support needs, the purpose of identification is educational - to ensure improved outcomes through tailored interventions and support, derived from ongoing and accurate assessment of strengths and development needs.

**A long-term approach should have the following:**

- ▶ early identification through use of South Lanarkshire's Staged Intervention Process
- ▶ intervention tailored to the individual child's learning needs
- ▶ regular monitoring and evaluation of progress.
- ▶ actively work or develops positive self esteem etc.

## Why is early identification important?

**How will I recognise dyslexia?**

### **Identification**

There are a number of well-known indicators of the possible presence of dyslexia and you as a class teacher need to be fully aware of these. Some or all of the below may be present

- ▶ little or no early knowledge of letters
- ▶ difficulties recognising sounds, including initial sounds
- ▶ difficulties with sound blending
- ▶ bizarre spelling errors
- ▶ reversed or muddled letters and/or syllables when reading or writing
- ▶ marked difficulties with sequencing, order and direction, both oral and aural
- ▶ discrepancy between oral language skills and reading skills
- ▶ poor auditory/verbal memory
- ▶ visual tracking difficulties

- ▶ speech and language difficulties
- ▶ a family history of dyslexia.

There are other indicators which are often, but not exclusively found in pupils with dyslexic difficulties. However, good readers can sometimes experience these too:

- ▶ word-finding difficulties in spoken language
- ▶ clumsiness and difficulties with co-ordination
- ▶ poor fine motor skills
- ▶ poor organisational skills
- ▶ poor handwriting
- ▶ difficulties learning tables
- ▶ lack of focus for literacy work - e.g. restlessness, yawning, (possibly due to tiredness due to amount of effort required)
- ▶ taking an excessive amount of time to do homework.

**There may also be other behaviours related to children's experience of chronic failure:**

- ▶ avoidance strategies
- ▶ professed dislike of reading and writing
- ▶ behaviours showing frustration and poor self-esteem (for example, touchiness, huffiness, apparent indifference or lack of interest)
- ▶ a failure to thrive within the classroom situation.

## **How can I help?**

### **Development of literacy skills**

Teachers have the core teaching skills to help most of their pupils with additional support needs, including those who are dyslexic.

### **What strategies are needed?**

- ▶ an accurate assessment of the child's literacy skills, strengths and areas of difficulty is needed in order to intervene effectively
- ▶ a structured approach to tackling phonics and fluency at least 3 times per week, with opportunities for both individual and group work
- ▶ practice in the recognition of the phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (letters) that represent them should be structured and systematic
- ▶ overlearning should be a key component of any approach
- ▶ daily reading aloud to a skilled reader is a key strategy for developing fluency

- ▶ reading material needs to be at the correct level of ease of reading for fluency to be acquired (90/95% accuracy is needed)
- ▶ paired reading can be a useful tool in the development of fluency
- ▶ repetitive text is helpful, in order to aid overlearning
- ▶ extensive use of software to develop phonics, fluency, writing and spelling skills is required
- ▶ development of touch typing skills can help literacy skills
- ▶ encouragement of oral/taped responses
- ▶ the teaching of reading, writing, talking and listening together
- ▶ the use of different colours/fonts/sizes to minimize visual difficulties
- ▶ differentiation of written tasks
- ▶ the use of talking books
- ▶ the teaching of organisational skills
- ▶ the encouragement of cooperative learning groups
- ▶ the use of buddy(ies) can help learning environment
- ▶ partnership with parents/carers.
- ▶ albeit there is a necessary focus on gaining the necessary decoding skills, the broader language development needs of the pupil should also continue to be met at a level of challenge appropriate to the pupil's language development

## Information Technology

ICT has the potential to compensate for the difficulties experienced by dyslexic pupils and to overcome some of the barriers to learning that they may encounter.

The use of ICT involving visual, auditory and kinaesthetic memory with sound prompts and spoken feedback is likely to be of great value to dyslexic pupils not only in moving information from short-term to long-term memory but in the quality of language processing and mastery of subject-specific concepts.

ICT can help reduce difficulties in the acquisition of skill in literacy by providing opportunities for reinforcement of reading and spelling skills.

In addition ICT can facilitate access to the curriculum and can help pupils to derive information from texts and produce a written response. By skilful use of ICT, pupils can demonstrate their ability in all curricular areas with relative independence and confidence.

## To encourage motivation and develop confidence:

- ▶ ensure that the child/ young person does not become defined by his or her dyslexic needs
- ▶ ensure the child/young person has opportunities to succeed every day, including in language tasks
- ▶ give specific, accurate and encouraging feedback
- ▶ involve the child/young person in target-setting and self assessment of next steps
- ▶ allow extra time for assignments or differentiate in other ways
- ▶ ensure homework is appropriate and instructions properly recorded

- ▶ marking; ensure work is marked according to explicit learning outcomes/success criteria, and not just for 'secretarial' errors
- ▶ target specific areas in relation to the dyslexic difficulties
- ▶ find opportunities to make the pupils aware of curricular areas in which they have strengths.
- ▶ ensure the child's interests are taken into account in offering choice of reading texts

## How can I help parents?

### General principles and advice

Schools need to promote an active partnership with parents. Only through working as a team can the pupil's difficulties be understood, and appropriate strategies employed and reinforced to ensure positive learning experiences and progression for the pupil.

### Some suggestions for developing an effective partnership:

- ▶ have a named person in the school for parents to contact and a system for ensuring two-way communication
- ▶ demonstrate that appropriate support is being provided
- ▶ hold regular meetings to provide updates on and review progress
- ▶ work together with parents to improve pupil motivation, self-confidence and self-efficacy as a learner
- ▶ involve parents fully in all aspects of their child's learning.

## With individual parents

Listen carefully to parents if they raise concerns about their child's learning.

Ask yourself the following questions when approached by parents who are expressing concerns:

- Why are they so concerned?
- What can we do to improve the situation?

Some parents may have had, or have family members who have had difficulties in this area themselves. Such parents may have strong views or feelings about their child's difficulties, and need to be met with sensitivity and understanding.

## Useful publication list

Some of these books may be available from Specialist Support Teachers within your learning community. There are a lot of useful websites on this topic. Please see also publications for parents detailed in Guide for Parents

**Count Me In - Responding to Dyslexia**  
Strathclyde University/Scottish Executive  
<http://www.countmein.org.uk/>

**Dyslexia: A Practitioner's Handbook (3rd Edition)**  
by G Reid. Pub: Wiley ISBN 0470848529

**The Dyslexia-friendly Primary School: A Practical Guide for Teachers** by B Pavey.  
Pub: Paul Chapman ISBN 1412910307

**Dyslexia and Literacy, Theory and practice**  
by G Reid and J Wearmouth. Pub: Wiley ISBN 0471486345

**Dyslexia in Secondary School: a Practical Handbook for Teachers, Parents and Students** by J Cogn and M Flecker.  
Pub: Whurr ISBN 1861562721

**Dyslexia, Speech and Language: A Practitioner's Handbook** by M Snowling and J Stackhouse.  
Pub: Whurr ISBN 1861564856

**Helping Children With Reading and Spelling Difficulties: A Special Needs Manual** by R Reason and R Boote.  
Pub: Routledge ISBN 0415107334

**Make Your Classroom Dyslexia Friendly**  
by K Moore and S Johnson-Marshall.  
Pub: Desktop ISBN 9781872406541

**Mind Mapping for Kids: An Introduction**  
by T Buzan.  
Pub: Thorsens ISBN 0007151330

**Overcoming Dyslexia: A Practical Handbook for the Classroom** by H Broomfield and M Combley.  
Pub: WileyBlackwell ISBN 1861562586

**Phonics: Practice, Research and Policy**  
by M Lewis and SJ Ellis.  
Pub: Paul Chapman ISBN 9781412930864

**Sound Practice: Phonological Awareness in the Classroom (Resource Materials for Teachers)** by L Layton and K Deeney.  
Pub: David Fulton ISBN 1853468010

**Education for learners with dyslexia, HMIE, 2008**  
<http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/eflwd.html>

## **Useful websites**

[www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk)

[www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia)

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/welfare/ASL/dyslexia](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/welfare/ASL/dyslexia)

If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us to discuss how we can best meet your needs.

Phone: 01698 710568

Email: [enquiries@slcpsych.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@slcpsych.org.uk)

[www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk](http://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk)