

Northamptonshire County Council Guidelines: Specific learning difficulties - dyslexia

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) is an umbrella term that includes a range of learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and specific language impairments. This document focuses upon the specific learning difficulty of 'Dyslexia'. It does not set out to address the full range of specific learning difficulties.
- 1.1 This document outlines guidelines for Northamptonshire County Council's (NCC) practice in relation to dyslexia. It describes:
- A definition of dyslexia
 - The Northamptonshire context in terms of the role of schools / other education settings, carers/parents, education support teams and other professional and voluntary agencies in relation to dyslexia
- 1.2 These guidelines were produced by a working party of school staff and education support teams during 2005/06.

2.1 Definition

Dyslexia is a term used to describe severe and persistent difficulties with accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling and sometimes number and calculation, despite appropriate learning opportunities. It is a learning difference, a combination of strengths and weaknesses, which present unexpected and persistent difficulties in certain areas, despite these adequate learning opportunities.

Dyslexic learners may have accompanying difficulties in:

- **short term memory**
- **sequencing and organisational skills**
- **speed of information processing**
- **auditory, phonological and perceptual skills**

The above definition combines those from the British Psychological Society [BPS] (1999), '*Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment*' and DfES/British Dyslexia Association [DfES/BDA] (2005), '*Primary National Strategy, Learning & teaching for dyslexic children*'

- 2.2 The decision that a pupil is dyslexic is essentially a professional judgement based on this working definition. It is anticipated that such a decision will only be reached through the involvement of those professionals who hold appropriate, additional qualifications. While there may be degrees of severity identified, the working definition does not require the judgement that a pupil is dyslexic to be based on any form of discrepancy between ability and attainment. Equally, the definition allows for dyslexia to be identified across the range of cognitive ability.
- 2.3 Its focus is one of identification and intervention through teaching. It requires that three aspects are evaluated:
- the accuracy and fluency with which the pupil is reading and/or spelling
 - the appropriateness of the learning opportunities that have been provided
 - the extent of additional support that has been required to achieve the identified progress

- 2.5 The term 'dyslexia' can be used to describe a pupil's learning difficulty when it fulfils the working definition of dyslexia adopted as part of these guidelines. It will also require assessment to be made of the severity and persistence of the pupil's learning difficulty with word reading and/or spelling and the identification of accompanying difficulties, where these are present.
- 2.6 Severity is a measure of the nature and extent of the pupil's learning difficulty, while persistence is a measure of the duration of the difficulty in response to appropriate and thorough learning opportunities and support offered to the pupil over time within the school and home. Both severity and persistence need to be assessed within the context of the overall development and understanding of the pupil.
- 2.7 Assessment of severity can be made by reference to results of
- Standardised literacy tests
 - Curriculum assessment
 - Diagnostic and observational assessment
- 2.8 Assessment of persistence can be made by reference to:
- Quality of inclusive class teaching and classroom support
 - Duration, appropriateness and thoroughness of 'Wave 3' interventions
 - Background factors that could impact upon literacy learning
- 2.9 The definition in paragraph 2.1 provides a suitable basis for practice for the following additional reasons:
- It helps to provide a basis for a shared understanding between children, carers/parents and professionals
 - It demystifies the label of dyslexia through basing it on what is observable
 - It is a working definition independent of theoretical explanations
 - It identifies dyslexia as a teaching issue through focusing on literacy learning at the word level as part of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and through responses identified within the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS)
 - It encourages early intervention by teachers as part of the graduated approach as outlined in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SEN CoP) (DfES 2001).
 - It is inclusive of all children who experience specific difficulties in word reading and/or spelling difficulties irrespective of ability, socio-economic background, additional SEN, culture or race
 - It does not depend on identifying a specific profile of underlying features or a discrepancy between abilities and attainment
 - It is compatible with national and local guidance on SEN and inclusion and on teaching approaches within English and mathematics:
 - *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* 2004-2005 DfES
 - *Removing Barrier to Achievement* 2003, DfES
 - Primary National Strategy (PNS) and Key Stage 3 Strategy, DfES
 - *SEN Code of Practice* 2001, DfES
 - *Inclusion Statement* - National Curriculum 2000, DfES
 - NCC SEN policy, 2004 – 2006, *Guidelines for parents on dyslexia*
 - *Dyslexia, A Guide for Parents and Carers*, NCC Children and Families Services (NCC intranet)

Northamptonshire context

3. Role of schools / other education settings

3.1 Non-specialist teachers are able to use screening tools for preliminary assessment of strengths and weaknesses and identifying early intervention strategies. Those teachers who hold additional, recognised qualifications will be well placed to identify dyslexia, specialist interventions and programmes and to advise staff. It would be good practice for all schools (or small-school clusters) to plan for at least one member of staff to have an additional qualification as part of their school's Accessibility Plan. Teaching Assistants can undertake accredited courses in supporting learners with specific learning difficulties. Where schools identify a need to further develop their skills and abilities, training can be accessed through NCC support services and / or the University of Northampton

- Schools / other education settings are expected to implement the main principles of the National Curriculum 2000 *Inclusion Statement*. These are
- setting suitable learning challenges
- responding to pupils' diverse learning needs and identifying suitable teaching styles
- overcoming barriers to learning and assessment, for both individual and groups of pupils.

3.2 Inclusive strategies are used across all phases to secure access to a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils and should lead to high quality teaching in all schools. As part of effective practice, primary schools provide three 'Waves of Intervention' (DfES). The DfES has now extended this description of 'Waves of Intervention' into secondary education:

Wave 1 - The effective inclusion of all pupils in 'quality-first teaching'

Wave 2 - Additional small-group intervention for pupils who are expected to catch up with their peers as a result of the intervention, for example, Early Literacy Support (ELS); Additional Literacy Support (ALS); Further Literacy Support (FLS); Booster Units; Springboard.

Wave 3 - Specific targeted approaches for pupils identified as requiring SEN support for literacy learning (pupils could be on School Action, School Action Plus or with a Statement of SEN).

3.3 Effective schools / other education settings take account of the views and experiences of their pupils in developing and evaluating interventions. Pupils can give clear and coherent accounts of approaches and learning styles that they have found helpful. An example of such an account is given below, from a Year 7 boy in a mainstream school, who said that he required:

Staff who read instructions to him, rather than those who give out written instructions and tell him to get on with his work;

Staff who, in practical lessons (such as science), show him [& the class] what to do before the pupils have to do the task themselves, rather than those who tell the class what is to be done without demonstration;

Staff who give a lot of support for writing, or where the worksheets have just single words to copy in, rather than those for whom written tasks start with a title and date, then blank paper in exercise books;

Staff who give credit for his understanding and what he says, rather than those who assess his worth mainly through written responses;

Staff who "treat him the same as other kids", that is, to start each session afresh, without an expectation that if there is trouble, then it will be from him.

3.4 Schools are expected to develop their own 'Dyslexia Friendly School' policy. An example of one of these is available through the specialist teaching team for Specific Language & Learning Difficulties & will be made available through the NCC website.

- 3.5 The DfES has produced guidance to help schools increase their understanding of dyslexia, its implications for teaching and learning and to help develop the range of successful strategies. Most recent guidance is found within the CD-rom, *Learning and teaching for dyslexic children* (DfES, 1184-2005).
- 3.6 Exchange of information between carers/parents and schools / other education settings is essential. Communication at times of transfer is particularly important.
- 3.7 Care should be taken not to use the term 'dyslexia' lightly, such as to describe weak literacy skills. When the identification of dyslexia is shared with pupils and their carers/parents, a careful explanation of the implications will be required, including identifying responses to any emotional difficulties that can accompany dyslexia.
- 3.8 Mainstream schools / other education settings deliver successful support and intervention for the vast majority of pupils having dyslexic difficulties. They should be able to identify early in pupils' education those who are experiencing difficulties in phonological processing and early word reading and/or spelling.
- 3.9 The interventions the school uses are set out on 'provision maps'. These may identify provision across the whole school, individual year groups and/or for the individual pupil.
- 3.10 As part of effective literacy provision, schools identify pupils who are underperforming. They provide suitable interventions (for example, Wave 2) that are monitored and evaluated so that pupils make appropriate progress. Others may be identified as requiring Wave 3 interventions, inline with the SEN Code of Practice and their progress monitored.
- 3.11 All teachers use strategies to support pupils to access the curriculum and these enable pupils to make progress in all curriculum areas. Pupils have access to multi-sensory and flexible approaches to learning as well as appropriate information technology, for example word processing facilities and spell checkers. In all areas of the curriculum, the pupil's strengths and talents need to be recognised and promoted, ensuring that their areas of weakness are not continually emphasised.
- 3.12 School identification and intervention will also be necessary for those pupils whose specific difficulties affect their progress in mathematics. Those pupils who have a specific difficulty may be seriously disadvantaged by mathematical reasoning being judged by assessment of basic arithmetic. While this is not to suggest that all those who struggle with maths are dyslexic, but those who do, in addition to having severe and persistent literacy difficulties may be dyslexic.
- 3.13 When a pupil's difficulties are long lasting and complex, schools and other maintained education settings may request the involvement of professionals from outside the school to contribute to the school's cycle of assessment, planning, intervention and review. With written consent from those who have parental responsibility, schools and other education settings are able to access specialist support from the Additional Needs Team (Specific Learning Difficulties team) and the Educational Psychology Service. The pupil's Individual Education Plan (IEP) will need to be amended to incorporate any advice received from these support services. Such pupils are likely to be at School Action Plus.
- 3.14 For a very small number of pupils, schools or other education settings may need to request that the Local Authority initiates statutory assessment. This may result in the Local Authority determining provision through a statement of SEN.

4. Encouraging the participation of parents and carers

- 4.1 Engagement with carers/parents is central to pupil progress. There is a Parental Questionnaire that guides schools on gathering useful information which may be relevant to the child's needs. This is available through the specialist teaching team for Specific Language & Learning Difficulties & will be made available through the NCC website
- 4.2 Support services and schools / other education settings need to be sensitive to and take account of carers/parents own learning experiences as part of any programme to support their child. Carers/parents can access support through Special Needs – Involving Parents (SN-IP), the Northamptonshire Parent Partnership Service.
- In the best interests of the pupil, NCC services, schools / other education settings and other agencies encourage and value involvement of carers/parents
 - Schools will maintain close contact with carers/parents with regard to the progress of their pupil and encourage and facilitate their attendance at meetings to review progress
 - School staff work with carers/parents to promote, support and monitor any agreed programmes at home
 - Staff will discuss any difficulties they or the pupil may be experiencing with carers/parents at the earliest opportunity
 - School will seek from carers/parents any social or medical information that could affect the pupil's progress. Initial information gathering will be to ensure that there has been a recent vision and hearing check for those pupils who have severe and persistent difficulties.
- 4.2 In relation to pupil learning, this working between home and school might take the form of:
- Providing guidance to carers/parents about how to read with and to their child, to help them develop and maintain an interest in learning to read
 - Providing guidance or materials for playing reading and writing games appropriate to the pupil's literacy development
 - Providing age and ability appropriate material to support home-based reading on a regular basis
 - Promoting access to a wide range of reading materials, such as encouraging the use of the local library
 - Helping carers/parents to encourage language development through talking to their child about things that interest him/her
 - Supporting carers/parents to help their child complete homework, such as through parents agreeing helpful routines, conditions and support at home and through school providing facilities within school for completion of 'homework'
 - Promoting the development of organisational / self help skills through encouraging the use of timetables / planners / calendars / checklists and developing regular routines.
 - Providing positive and appropriate feedback to foster and maintain the pupil's self esteem as a learner
- 4.3 It is essential that teachers and other school staff are very clear in their discussions with parents about the actions they are taking in school for the particular pupil, that recent assessment information is shared with parents about attainment, rate of progress and future learning targets and that parental concerns are fully aired and considered. Despite the advice of school staff, some parents may request that schools seek involvement of external support services.

Where there is a continuing disagreement between home and school about which services to involve, or whether to involve outside services, it can sometimes be helpful to invite the parent / carer to meet a support service colleague with a key member of the school staff for further discussion and clarification of actions required and those already taken (see sections 5 and 6, below).

Role of Children & Young People's Service – Inclusion

5. Additional Needs Teaching Team (specific learning difficulties)

- 5.1 The Specific Learning and Language Difficulties Team (SpLLD Team) is one of the Additional Needs Teams of specialist teachers within the Children & Young People's Service – Inclusion services. The team consists of teachers who have additional specialist qualifications and experience in the area of specific learning difficulties – dyslexia.
- 5.2 The team can provide one-off consultation at School Action. They work in partnership with school staff and other professionals to assess and advise on appropriate interventions at Early Years Action Plus / School Action Plus / Statements for pupils with specific learning difficulties, following appropriate Wave 3 input at Early Years Action / School Action.
- 5.3 Support from the team can include training of staff and demonstrations of using specialist teaching and assessment materials. The team also works with carers/parents and liaises with other professionals, as appropriate.
- 5.4 Schools access the team by completing a 'Request for Involvement' form that includes pupil and parental views and is countersigned by the carers/parents who have parental responsibility. Schools / other education settings are expected to have completed their own detailed assessment of the pupil's needs prior to involving specialist teachers.

6. Educational Psychology Service (EPS)

- 6.1 The EPS uses a consultation approach to work in partnership with school staff, carers/parents and other professionals to address concerns about an individual pupil's learning. This would normally follow appropriate intervention at Early Years Action / School Action. Schools / other education settings access the EPS by contacting their named EP and completing a 'Request for Involvement' form through discussion with their EP.
- 6.2 The EP brings together those most concerned about the pupil to explore, problem-solve and decide which approach or intervention is likely to be most successful and agree ways forward. As part of this consultation process, the EP can agree to undertake further work in order to contribute relevant information in future consultation meetings. This work could include:
 - Observations
 - Assessment
 - Information gathering
 - Multi-agency liaison
 - Research and evaluation
 - Training and provision development
- 6.3 EP assessment is undertaken to provide further information to support consultation with teachers, carers/parents and other professionals and to provide the NCC with Statutory Advice as part of a statutory assessment of SEN under the 1996 Education Act.
- 6.4 The main purpose of assessment is to provide information to support intervention as part of a consultation process with teachers, carers/parents and other professionals. This will include undertaking assessment to provide information about the pupil's:
 - Individual learning strengths and weaknesses and learning styles
 - Approach and attitudes to learning
 - Views and understanding of their difficulties
 - Relevant physical, developmental and social and emotional factors

- Contextual factors that affect learning
- Effective learning strategies

7. Involvement of other professionals and voluntary agencies

- 7.1 Where there are no additional medical or language difficulties, dyslexia would normally be viewed by non educational professionals as an educational issue which should be addressed by early years settings and schools as part of the graduated approach within the framework of the SEN CoP (DfES 2001). Medical and other professionals may consult the Additional Needs Team and/or the Educational Psychology Service, as appropriate.
- 7.2 There are a range of voluntary agencies established to promote awareness of dyslexia and to support parents / carers / young people. Some will be listed on the NCC web pages, Inclusion – SEN (currently under development – Autumn 2006).

8. Useful Contact Addresses

As contact addresses may change over time, a range of useful organisations and addresses are included within the NCC 'Inclusion – SEN' web pages (under construction). Information from practitioners that up-dates or amends these details should be e-mailed to education@northamptonshire.gov.uk for the attention of the lead specialist teacher for the Specific Learning & Language Team, Additional Needs Teachers.

9. Assessment Materials

Information about assessment and intervention materials for specific learning difficulties – dyslexia and links to other web sites are included within the NCC 'Inclusion – SEN' web pages. Information from practitioners that adds to, up-dates or amends this information should be e-mailed to education@northamptonshire.gov.uk for the attention of the lead specialist teacher for the Specific Learning & Language Team, Additional Needs Teachers.

10. Some relevant DfES publications

- *Including all children in the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson* (2002)
- *Guidance to support pupils with dyslexia and dyscalculia* (2001)
- *Targeting Support: choosing and implementing interventions for children with significant literacy difficulties*
- *Models and Images: using models and images to support mathematics teaching and learning in Years 1 to 3* (2003)
- *Learning and teaching for dyslexic children* (2005) CD
- *Social & emotional aspects of learning* (2005)

11. Access Arrangements for end of Key Stage assessments

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) publishes annually a detailed guide entitled, 'Access Arrangements and Special Consideration' for GCE, AEA, VCE, GCSE, GNVQ, Entry Level & Key Skills examinations. It is essential that all schools entering pupils to these examinations have a copy of this document and that key staff use this guide to identify permissible and appropriate access arrangements.

Additional guidance for KS4 can be found through the NCC publication, 'Northamptonshire Good Practice Guide to Access Arrangements' available through the specialist teaching team for Specific Language & Learning Difficulties & to be made available through the NCC website. This provides detailed advice on the implementation of assessment and reporting arrangements and is available through the SpLLD team. Members of NIAS, the Additional Needs Teams and the

Educational Psychology Service may be able to advise schools on applications for Access Arrangements.

Information and guidance on access arrangements for pupils in Key Stages 2 and 3 can be found in the current year's Assessment and Reporting Arrangements for each key stage. These booklets, entitled 'Assessment and reporting arrangements', are published jointly by DfES, QCA and the National Assessment Agency (NAA) and are revised annually. Each Key Stage has its own booklet detailing appropriate access arrangements. Further advice about access arrangements can be found on the NAA website at www.naa.org.uk

Further guidance and advice regarding access arrangements is available through NIAS, notably through the Curriculum Adviser for Assessment.