



## **GUIDANCE FOR EDUCATION STAFF IN THEIR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT LITERACY DIFFICULTIES INCLUDING DYSLEXIA**

### **Purpose of document**

**This document describes Dundee City Council's position on assessing and addressing literacy difficulties including dyslexia.** This document aims to promote a shared understanding of terminology, roles and processes relating to literacy development with particular reference to dyslexia.

Alongside this, the aim is for staff in school to feel confident and competent in their own role of assessment and intervention, their consultations with colleagues in school and other agencies and in their conversations with parents. This guidelines reflect good practice as outlined in Scotland's "Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit: for the identification and support of learners exhibiting literacy difficulties" which can be found here: <http://www.addressingdyslexia.org/>

### **Introduction**

Any guidance on assessment and support for learners in Dundee is necessarily consistent with the national requirements of the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Effective implementation, however, goes well beyond these requirements and consequently applies to all ages, all stages and for all departments throughout all schools across Dundee City. The following guidance is consistent with tracking systems which would be used routinely by schools to monitor the needs and the progress of all their pupils. The approach described will fit, therefore, within a framework of assessment and intervention in its widest sense and will be consistent with Dundee City Council Supporting Learning Policy and Guidelines. Its effective implementation, by all members of teaching staff, will contribute to ensuring consistency, equality and inclusion throughout and across the city's schools.

### **Application of principles of supporting learning policy**

In line with overall Authority principles and guidelines for educational assessment,

- assessment is an ongoing interactive, contextualised process which informs teaching and learning

- school staff, at both Primary and Secondary stages, are vigilant and proactive in identifying the barriers to learning and additional support needs of individual pupils
- appropriate arrangements for the assessment of pupils' output and understanding are consequently identified to ensure pupils have "an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities to the fullest" <sup>1</sup>
- such assessment arrangements apply for some pupils at all stages of their education
- staff are thorough and systematic in providing pupils with training and experience of these assessment arrangements and in monitoring outcomes of training and experience
- related assessment and intervention information is clearly recorded and well communicated between classes and between stages
- support required and provided within the daily teaching and learning situation will be built into any future National Assessment arrangements.

### What is dyslexia?

The term dyslexia means different things to different people and can be a source of worry to parents, pupils and staff. Because of this, it is important to work in partnership for clarity and shared understanding, seeing the issues of dyslexia within the whole field of literacy development. Currently, there is a range of definitions of dyslexia which can lead to confusion. After careful consideration, the definition of dyslexia recognised and applied currently by Dundee City Council is the one proposed by the British Psychological Society. This definition is based on a wide review of research and is currently used by the majority of local authorities in Scotland. It states:

*"Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the word level and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities."* (BPS, 1999).

Dyslexia exists in all cultures and across the range of abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. It is a hereditary, lifelong, neuro-developmental condition. If it is not identified, dyslexia is likely to result in low self-esteem, high stress, atypical behaviour and low achievement.

Dundee City Council recognises that dyslexia exists as a continuum and an important consideration is the severity of the **impact** on the individual learner.

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<sup>1</sup> SQA Guidance

## **Does dyslexia include other difficulties?**

Dyslexia is often associated with other difficulties including:

- Language processing, including sounds
- Working memory
- Number skills
- Motor skills, co-ordination and balance
- Organisational skills
- Sequencing and directionality

All aspects of reading and writing are commonly affected (e.g. understanding text, recording ideas). This has implications across the school curriculum.

Faced with these difficulties, the child can become frustrated and lacking in confidence. Often their behaviour gives us clues to how they are feeling.

It is important to remember that the pattern and severity of these difficulties will vary from child to child and the impact of these difficulties may change over time.

## **Does having dyslexia mean that pupils are otherwise very intelligent?**

Taking a common sense view, we may be more surprised to find that a child who is able in other areas is having difficulty in learning to read and/or spell. However, the ability to decode words is not determined by intelligence, therefore, if a child has difficulty reading words they can be described as dyslexic, irrespective of their ability in other areas. Individual differences between children will, however, determine the type of support needed to help them make progress. (It is really important to harness their strengths; many children who experience a dyslexic difficulty will have identified strengths in other areas of learning.)

## **Is there a test for dyslexia?**

There is no single, agreed test for dyslexia. Some people working within the field of dyslexia will carry out a range of psychological and educational tests in order to make a diagnosis. However, the approach taken by Dundee and recommended in the Assessing Dyslexia Toolkit is to:

- gather information regarding the child's strengths and difficulties
- identify how all involved can contribute to meeting the child's needs

## **What does this process of gathering information (i.e. assessment) look like?**

This process begins with a conversation around the progress the child is making with regard to fluent reading and/or spelling. The conversation will be initiated when someone expresses a concern about the child's progress. This conversation will highlight the child's literacy skills; where there are gaps in learning or where the child is experiencing difficulty.

Teachers in Dundee have access to Addressing Barriers to Learning (ABLE), a framework for the detailed assessment of Additional Support Needs, including dyslexia ([www.ableschools.org.uk](http://www.ableschools.org.uk)) The ABLe framework may be used to support discussion around the nature of the difficulties being experienced by the child. The conversation will also take account of the following potentially relevant factors:

- previous difficulties the child has experienced with word reading and/or spelling
- the impact on the child's ability to access the curriculum
- the child's image of him/her self as a learner
- effectiveness of previous teaching/ learning experiences
- family factors
- sensory issues - hearing, vision and movement
- health issues
- peer relationships

### **Does the school take account of independent assessments?**

Some parents choose to pay for an assessment to be done privately. The results can inform the bigger picture but it is essential that there is a focus on how the child/young person performs within the school context.

In addition, the Additional Support for Learning (Education) (Scotland) Act of 2004 allows any child or young person for whom the education authority is responsible, or their parent, to seek assessment to establish whether the child or young person has additional support needs and how to make appropriate provision to support these.

This recognition within the Act ensures that appropriate assessment is required to be provided within the child's school and Local Authority. Any independent assessment pursued by parents/carers should therefore be seen as their personal choice and additional to, not instead of, current local provision.

### **Is it dyslexia?**

The information which is gathered helps those involved come to a conclusion based on the definition of dyslexia above and plan appropriate support. If the joint decision of all involved is that the definition has been met, then the child can be described as having dyslexia. Regardless of whether the term dyslexia is applied, the assessment process should also address the question:

- What methods/approaches work best in helping this child to make progress?

### **What happens next?**

We know a lot about the best ways to teach reading and spelling. This knowledge, together with the information about the child's strengths, difficulties and what works best for them, helps us to plan a programme of support. This will be reviewed after an agreed time.

ABLE can support the process of planning through the completion of the learning plan. Other resources may also be used in the planning and intervention process

e.g. the "Assessing Dyslexia" toolkit <http://www.addressingdyslexia.org/> mentioned previously.

### **How are the child's learning needs met in school?**

Support will be provided which is appropriate to the age and stage of the child. The level of support provided is determined by the nature and extent of the individual's needs and can be made available at the class, school and/or city level. There are also strategies which can be carried out at home.

Interventions at:

- **individual level** might include coaching for specific skills and strategies which could include playing games at home
- **class** level might include differentiation of work; work within a small group; alternative presentation methods for the pupil's work; help from support staff
- **school** level might include liaison, consultation and support by Support for Learning staff, other support staff and/or staff from Educational Psychology; Multi-sensory/ Bilingual Pupil Support Service; School Community Support Service
- **city** level might include support provided by colleagues from other agencies such as: Social Work, NHS Tayside Health Board, voluntary agencies.

Planning for the provision of additional support can be done through whole class and/or individualised planning. Some of the planning documents used by staff in Dundee schools include:

- whole class planning
- ABLe plans
- Single Child's Plans

### **What can parents/carers do to help their child?**

Parents/carers have important information about their child's development so it is essential that they are involved in the assessment process. They may be invited to lead or encourage certain activities at home as part of their child's programme of support. One of the most important things they can do is to read to/with their child and give plenty of encouragement.

### **How will parents/carers be kept informed of progress?**

Parents and carers will be kept informed of their child's progress through the standard provision of parent evenings and formal reports. In addition, where it is deemed necessary to plan provision for the pupil through individualised planning, school staff will organise planning and review meetings at regular intervals.

Within Early Years settings and primary schools, the first point of contact for any parent/ carer would be the Head Teacher.

Within secondary schools, the first point of contact for any parent/ carer would usually be the Guidance teacher or Principal Teacher, Support for Learning.

### **Information sharing at transition**

There is a process of transition planning in place each time pupils with additional support needs change from one sector to the next: nursery to primary; primary to secondary; secondary to post school. Similarly, transition planning takes place as children and young people progress from one stage to the next within each of these three sectors.

Transition planning for pupils with additional support needs moving from primary to secondary will begin during P6. All relevant adults around the child will be involved in reviewing the pupil's strengths and development needs; noting successful support strategies; seeking the view of the child and the parent or carer. A recommendation will be made with regard to the nature of provision and extent of the package of support required by the child so he or she can make the transition to secondary school as smoothly as possible. The record of such a transition planning meeting will be made available to the secondary school; in addition, examples of the child's work may also be provided along with any formal academic assessment. Any relevant information from other agencies should also be highlighted to the receiving secondary school.

### **What kind of support might be provided in the secondary school?**

This transition process allows strategies used successfully in primary to continue to be in place in secondary for as long as they continue to be helpful. If, for example, a pupil expressed preference in primary school not to be asked to read aloud, this should be made known to secondary staff and shared with subject teachers so this continues to be an option for that pupil. Access to Information Technology can compensate for underlying difficulties with literacy. Specific consideration of appropriate assessment arrangements will continue in class and will be put in place for any formal assessment or external exams.

In common with all teaching and support staff within the Education Department, secondary school departments have access to a programme of continuing professional development which provides courses and training with regard to the wide range of additional support needs, including dyslexia. Such courses are offered by training providers at both local and national levels.

### **Will dyslexic pupils get help in their exams?**

All pupils with significant additional support needs (irrespective of whether they have a diagnosis or label of dyslexia) should experience assessment arrangements which give them an equal chance to show what they know and can do.

In most cases, the pupil should be able to use their normal way of working. For example, if the pupil has needed to use a word processor or has needed a scribe to overcome writing difficulties, they should have the use of a word processor or a scribe in assessments or examinations.

The pupil may not automatically get an individualised assessment arrangement just because they are dyslexic - they may not need one. Their individual needs and successful strategies will determine whether or not they need particular assessment arrangements.

The arrangements are not concessions to make the assessment or examination easier - they just allow the pupil to show their knowledge and skills. So, in order to use these arrangements in external exams, the school needs to provide the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) with evidence for each pupil that the arrangements are fair, reasonable and necessary.

### **Who else will know they receive such help?**

The pupil and his/ her parent(s)/ carer(s); members of school staff who organise and provide the support and the invigilators who supervise the exams; administrative staff in schools who submit the records required to SQA; the colleagues who mark the exam scripts and those who moderate within the subject will all necessarily be aware of the difficulty and the consequent assessment arrangements.

There is no notification on a pupil's certificate from SQA to show that particular exam arrangements have been provided. This allows the individual pupil to make their own decisions about how to share that information appropriately.

### **How can continued support be guaranteed after school? (e.g. at college or university)**

The continuing support needs of the young person are discussed as part of their post-school transition process, which begins in S3.

The label of dyslexia is not necessary for accessing support while the child attends school because support will be provided to overcome their barrier(s) to learning however they are described. Parents and carers are often anxious, however, that such support will not continue beyond school given that some colleges and universities require such a label. In Dundee, we suggest that where it is helpful, the school drafts a letter in partnership with the educational psychologist that describes the young person's needs, strategies and makes reference to the definition of dyslexia stated above, where appropriate.

### **If/When an educational psychologist is involved, what is their role?**

If/when an educational psychologist becomes involved in supporting a child it is to help clarify concerns, identify necessary resources and elicit possible solutions within a co-operative and multi-disciplinary framework. Dundee's Educational Psychology Service (DEPS) has, as a consequence and in line with other EP services across Scotland, moved away from individual, isolated, non-contextual assessment methods. Current problem-solving approaches emphasise the value of effective, least-intrusive interventions at the earliest practical stage and are therefore preventative in their focus. The guidance contained in this leaflet is endorsed by DEPS as reflecting effective and preventative practice.

It is not necessary for a school to involve an educational psychologist in carrying out a separate dyslexia assessment. Ways in which DEPS provides support and advice regarding dyslexia include:

- providing an informed outsider's view on the process of assessment
- offering advice on next steps
- helping school teams to apply the education service guidelines
- validating assessment arrangements for SQA exams
- supporting transitions between schools or onto Higher Education

In some cases, the parent or school may ask the psychologist to do more direct work with a pupil. Before undertaking any direct work with a child, the psychologist, along with appropriate school staff, would discuss this with the parent/carer and the child to establish a shared understanding of what would be appropriate next steps for all involved.