

**EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE:**

**Policy Statement on Literacy Difficulties and Dyslexia**

**Introduction:**

The Educational Psychology Service is committed to promoting high standards of literacy for all children and young people (CYP) in the city of York. We believe that all CYP should have access to high-quality, well-differentiated ‘quality first’ teaching across the curriculum within our schools and settings, as informed by current research and national guidance. We recognise that some CYP find learning to read and write far more challenging than others, despite high quality opportunities and input. Research highlights the importance of identifying the needs of these individuals early and ensuring that they are given timely support within a graduated approach (1), aligning with national policy and good practice for CYP with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND Code of Practice, 2015). We also know that the emotional well-being of CYP experiencing literacy difficulties is a high priority when promoting more positive outcomes for this group.

In York, we are committed to promoting the rights of CYP in our city. Articles within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; 1989) that are particularly relevant to CYP with literacy difficulties are:

<p><b>Article 3 (best interests of the child):</b> The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.</p>	<p><b>Article 12 (respect for the views of the child):</b> Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.</p>	<p><b>Article 17 (access to information from the media):</b> Every child has the right to reliable information from a variety of sources, and governments should encourage media to provide information that children can understand.</p>	<p><b>Article 23 (children with a disability):</b> A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community.</p>
<p><b>Article 28 (right to education):</b> Every child has the right to an education.</p>	<p><b>Article 29 (goals of education):</b> Education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full.</p>	<p><b>Article 31 (leisure, play and culture):</b> Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.</p>	<p><b>Article 42 (knowledge of rights):</b> Governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.</p>

**Definition and Identification:**

In York, we feel it is important to address the needs of all CYP with literacy difficulties, irrespective of a label or diagnosis. This includes CYP experiencing difficulties in any combination, or all, of the following areas, despite appropriate teaching and evidence-based intervention:

- Word reading
- Spelling
- Writing
- Reading comprehension<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This guidance focuses on CYP whose difficulties with reading comprehension are linked to the acquisition and fluency of decoding skills; rather than those who struggle to read for meaning despite age-appropriate decoding skills.

There is no universally agreed definition of dyslexia and much ongoing debate in the field of literacy difficulties and dyslexia with regard to how we identify, describe and meet needs (2). When appropriate, we refer to the working definition of dyslexia described in 2009 by Sir Jim Rose in his report to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (1):

- **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 co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.
- A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention.

This definition summarises the common features of difficulties observed across childhood, adolescence and adulthood and has no exclusionary criteria or clear cut off points. Rose's definition recognises that needs on the dyslexia continuum are apparent in CYP with different levels of general ability, and across languages, ethnicities, socio-economic status and gender. The report acknowledges that no particular cognitive profile on its own can discriminate between a CYP with and without needs on the dyslexia continuum.

The extent to which practitioners use the term 'dyslexia' to describe literacy needs varies significantly across the UK and internationally, and therefore the definition of dyslexia for a CYP may be largely determined by the interpretation of the practitioner completing the assessment (2). Within York, Educational Psychologists may refer to 'dyslexia' or the 'dyslexia continuum' to describe a CYP's literacy needs following a psychological assessment, having discussed this framework with the CYP and their parents/carers. The Educational Psychologist will always consider whether language used is meaningful and helpful for the CYP.

In addition, there will be times when, having considered the strengths and needs of the CYP, the views of the CYP and their parents/carers and their history of literacy experiences, an Educational Psychologist may feel that the framework of the dyslexia continuum is not appropriate or the most helpful for planning to meet the CYP's needs. As noted in the 'Provision in York' section below, the use of a diagnosis or label of dyslexia does not affect the CYP's access to provision in schools.

**In our view, the priorities for all CYP with literacy difficulties (including those with a label or diagnosis of dyslexia) are:**

- **gaining a clear understanding of what specific skills they are struggling to learn and apply;**
- **involving the CYP and their parents/carers in the conversation;**
- **planning timely support to meet their individual needs;**
- **reviewing progress regularly, making adjustments to provision as needed.**

**Assessment and Intervention:**

We regard early assessment and intervention as not only essential to addressing literacy difficulties, but also as vital to preventing the emotional distress and disengagement from learning that can arise as a result of these barriers to learning.

Schools and settings are best placed to identify and meet the needs of CYP with literacy difficulties within a 'literacy-friendly', inclusive environment that promotes children's rights. A focus on quality first teaching in line with the Simple View of Reading (3) alongside regular whole staff development is essential, as is working in partnership with parents and carers (1).

Research suggests that the principles of effective intervention are the same for all CYP with reading difficulties, including those with dyslexia (2). Specific and targeted interventions for all children with literacy difficulties should be planned, implemented and reviewed regularly on the basis of assessment for teaching (4) (rather than assessment for diagnosis) to promote positive outcomes for CYP (5).

Schools and settings are expected to promote early identification of the difficulties that CYP experience in their literacy development by facilitating a graduated approach to assessment and intervention as advised in the SEND Code of Practice (2015) and as detailed below in the Rose Report (1):

***Level 1 – Monitoring Progress***

All teachers are expected to adjust their teaching to meet individual differences in the way that CYP respond to learning opportunities. Through regular on-going assessment and observation, teachers can identify CYP experiencing difficulties with reading skills, phonological processing, and/or spelling. At this stage, alternative hypotheses such as difficulties with hearing or vision should be considered and checked. Teachers should also ensure that literacy difficulties are investigated and identified where CYP have English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Children acquire literacy skills at different ages and at differing rates and, as a result start school with varying levels of literacy. In 2012, the government introduced the Phonic Screening Check for 6 year olds across all primary schools; this may be the first indication that a child needs additional support. All schools are able to provide targeted interventions or 'catch-up' programmes. The provision may involve daily work in a small group with a trained practitioner using a recognised evidence-based approach.

Cycles of 'assess-plan-do-review' will indicate whether difficulties need further investigation and intervention.

***Level 2 – Skills Assessment***

Difficulties may persist after initial 'catch-up' programmes have been rigorously applied and evaluated. A suitably qualified or experienced teacher and/or the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) can carry out further assessment of the CYP's skills and their response to intervention.

There is no single assessment for literacy difficulties or dyslexia. Skills assessment examines how the CYP approaches learning and a range of assessment tools may be useful to explore this. Formative assessments that inform intervention are most helpful alongside a holistic view of the CYP which takes account of their skills, views and any other co-occurring needs such as language, maths, concentration, motor co-ordination and organisational skills. Standardised assessments of reading and spelling can be used as a baseline to establish how the CYP is performing in comparison to same-age peers.

Additional intensive interventions consist of structured small group or one-to-one programmes, that are carefully targeted and delivered by teachers, or trained teaching assistants (TAs) who are closely supervised by teaching staff. This provision will be offered in addition to a differentiated approach and will be:

- Evidence-based (i.e. with a proven research based record of success)
- Open to on-going evaluation
- Structured and cumulative
- Using multi-sensory methods for teaching word level work
- Delivered regularly and frequently according to the programme

The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust has developed an [online search tool](#) of evidence-based interventions based on 'What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties' by Professor Greg Brooks (6).

Assessment for intervention is carried out with the aim of planning for provision as described within the [York SEN Banding Thresholds](#) for Cognition and Learning. **This should always be planned in partnership with the CYP and their parents/carers.**

In line with the Equality Act (2010), reasonable adjustments must be put in place to ensure access to learning across the curriculum wherever appropriate, for example through auxiliary aids. Examples of reasonable adjustments or reducing barriers to learning in lessons include alternative methods of reading (e.g. reading pens, readers) and alternative methods of recording (e.g. scribes, touch typing, Dictaphones, voice-activated software).

['Access arrangements'](#) for examinations may also be required such as extra time or a word processor. Settings will need to provide evidence that these are the 'normal ways of working' for the CYP.

### *Level 3 – Comprehensive Assessment*

For CYP who experience significant, persistent and complex literacy difficulties further assessment, guidance and intervention may be sought from external agencies, including York's SEN Support Services.

All the information gathered so far will form part of a comprehensive appraisal of CYP's strengths and the nature and extent of their difficulties along with any co-occurring needs. Appropriate qualified specialist teachers and other professionals (including Educational Psychologists), in consultation with parents/carers and staff, consider whether the CYP presents with more complex literacy needs and establish the impact on their learning and emotional wellbeing. This input, within cycles of 'assess-plan-do-review' led by the setting, will enable more tailored approaches to be developed and evaluated. For a very small number of CYP, it may be appropriate to apply for an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment – see details below under 'Provision in York'.

### **Emotional Well-being:**

Provision to support the confidence and emotional well-being of CYP with literacy needs is a high priority. Settings can develop this by ensuring:

- Ready access to real books linked to the CYP's interests to encourage reading for pleasure
- A strong focus on strengths and what the CYP *can* do
- A setting-wide emphasis on growth mindset (7)
- A shared understanding and a collaborative approach between the CYP, parents/carers and staff
- An explanation of strengths and difficulties which makes sense to the CYP
- A balance of specific, genuine praise for effort and attainment
- Access to examples of positive role models who experience/d literacy difficulties
- Positive and supportive feedback from peers facilitated by staff

With reference to Article 31 of the UNCRC, it is also very important to ensure a balanced approach in which the CYP has planned opportunities to relax, play and develop a range of other skills (which they may acquire with greater ease than literacy skills) to support their emotional well-being.

Emotional well-being should also be monitored through the assess-plan-do-review cycle alongside literacy measures. Schools and settings may use tools such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and the Social Emotional and Behavioural Competencies to monitor CYP's progress in this area.

### **Involvement of the Educational Psychology Service:**

Educational Psychologists can become involved at different levels, including; consultation for individuals and groups of CYP; individual casework and systemic work such as delivering training. Educational Psychologists negotiate and prioritise their involvement with SENCOs or Inclusion Leaders during termly planning meetings.

For individual casework, an Educational Psychology assessment will:

- Incorporate the CYP's views and aspirations
- Contribute to an ongoing process of 'assess-plan-do-review' facilitated by the setting which recognises the 'expertise' of everyone involved
- Involve parents/carers as contributors to the process
- Take account of previous assessments and information gathered so far
- Be formative and help to clarify any required intervention
- Ideally be conducted over time

The Educational Psychology Service also offers a range of traded training packages including Dyslexia Awareness, along with other training which may be relevant to this group (e.g. Precision teaching, Working memory, Self-esteem and Resilience).

### **Provision in York:**

The vast majority of children with literacy difficulties can have their needs met within a mainstream setting in the context of high quality teaching and appropriate differentiation. Should additional support be required following a graduated response as detailed in the information above, a label or diagnosis of dyslexia would not affect this process or the level of support provided to a CYP. Additional resourcing is based on description of need and evidence of

appropriate intervention and support over time. The City of [York SEN Banding Thresholds](#) for Cognition and Learning provide further information in this regard.

In a very small number of instances, where a CYP is experiencing significant, persistent and complex literacy difficulties, despite a history of appropriate evidence-based learning opportunities, the Local Authority may take the decision to carry out a statutory assessment of a CYP's needs (following a request) in order to determine whether an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) is required. A label or diagnosis of dyslexia is not required to evidence need or access additional resources from the Local Authority through an EHCP.

Further detailed information about provision for CYP with SEND can be found on York's Local Offer SEND via the links below. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service ([SENDIASS](#)) are available to offer independent support and guidance for parents/carers.

### **Enhanced Resource Provision (ERP) for primary-aged pupils with literacy difficulties:**

York has a well-established Local Authority funded provision for primary-aged pupils experiencing persistent literacy difficulties/dyslexia. The ERP, based at St Oswald's Primary School, is for pupils with the most significant and persistent needs who are receiving support through a My Support Plan (MSP) or EHCP. Pupils remain on roll of their mainstream school, attending the ERP in the mornings and their local mainstream school in the afternoons. The ERP specialist teacher also offers outreach support to mainstream primary schools.

Further information including the criteria and process for making an application to the ERP can be found via the links below. Requests for places at St Oswald's ERP should be made by the school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator following a graduated response and in full consultation with the CYP, their parents/carers and the school's designated Educational Psychologist.

### **Useful Links and Documents:**

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989)
- [SEND Code of Practice \(2015\)](#)
- [Equality Act \(2010\)](#)
- [York's Local Offer for SEND](#)
  - [Local guidance and policy](#) including the documents below:
    - City of York Council Cognition and Learning Banding
    - Admissions criteria for ERP for Children with Dyslexia
    - ERP Dyslexia Checklist for Evidence
  - [Enhanced Resource Provisions](#)
- [Dyslexia Friendly Schools Pack, British Dyslexia Association](#)
- [Dyslexia-SpLD Trust](#)
- [Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration \(Joint Council for Qualifications; JCQ\)](#)

## References:

1. **Rose, J.** *Identifying and teaching children and young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties*. Great Britain : DCSF, 2009.
2. **Elliott, J G and Grigorenko, E L.** *The Dyslexia Debate*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 2014.
3. *The simple view of reading.* **Hoover, W.A. & Gough, P.B.** s.l. : Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 1990, Vol. 2. 127-160.
4. *Applying Assessment Through Teaching and Instructional Psychology: An Alternative Model of Service Delivery to Raise Attainment in Primary Schools.* **Ward, J, Crawford, S and Solity, J.** 1, s.l. : Educational & Child Psychology, 2017, Vol. 34.
5. *Specific reading disability(dyslexia): what have we learned over the past four decades?* **Vellutino, F R, et al.** 1, s.l. : Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 2004, Vol. 45.
6. *What works for children and young people with literacy difficulties? The effectiveness of intervention schemes.* **Brooks, G.** s.l. : The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust, 2016.
7. **Dweck, C.** *Mindset: Changing the way you think to fulfil your potential*. s.l. : Robinson, 2017.
8. *Evidence-based interventions for reading and language difficulties: Creating a virtuous circle.* **Snowling, M J and Hulme, C.** 1, 2011, British Journal of Educational Psychology, Vol. 81. 1-23.