



From mountain to sea

Guidelines to Support Literacy



Guidelines updated by a steering group including teaching staff, ASPECTS and Educational Psychology

Version	Status	Issue date	Reason
0.1	Initial Draft	31/08/2015	Update of existing guidance
0.2	Working Draft	22/12/2015	Further update following consultation
1.0	Published	18/10/2016	Final version

Guidance to be reviewed in July 2017

Background

With these guidelines, Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services endeavour to ensure equitable and appropriate teaching and learning for children and young people with literacy difficulties including dyslexia. The good practice outlined in this policy, whilst appropriate for youngsters with dyslexia, would equally benefit any child or young person experiencing literacy difficulties and indeed many of the strategies used to support these pupils can benefit all pupils.

A steering group, comprising teaching staff with an expertise in the field of literacy difficulties together with educational psychologists, was established to take forward the original guidelines. The creation of the original guidelines was in response to authority-wide research exploring the use of assessment around youngsters with literacy difficulties. These updated guidelines take into account the recommendation that the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit', which has been funded by the Scottish Government Support and Wellbeing Unit, be more widely used.

www.addressingdyslexia.org

What is Dyslexia?

Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services uses the working definition of dyslexia which has been developed by the Scottish Government, Dyslexia Scotland and the Cross Party Group on Dyslexia in the Scottish Parliament. This is one of many definitions available. The aim of this particular working definition is to provide a description of the range of indicators and characteristics of dyslexia as helpful guidance for educational practitioners, pupils, parents/carers and others.

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 often do not reflect an individual's cognitive abilities and may not be typical of performance in other areas.

The impact of dyslexia as a barrier to learning varies in degree according to the learning and teaching environment, as there are often associated difficulties such as:

- **Auditory and/or visual processing of language-based information**
- **Phonological awareness**
- **Oral language skills and reading fluency**
- **Short-term and working memory**
- **Sequencing and directionality**
- **Number skills**
- **Organisational ability**

Motor skills and co-ordination may also be affected.

Dyslexia exists in all cultures and across the range of abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. It is a hereditary, life-long, neurodevelopmental condition. Unidentified, dyslexia is likely to result in low self-esteem, high stress, atypical behaviour and low achievement.

Learners with dyslexia will benefit from early identification of their needs. Appropriate intervention and targeted effective teaching then enables them to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

It has to be remembered that at all stages dyslexia is on a continuum or spectrum. This can vary from mild to severe with a range of difficulties and strengths according to the nature of the activity undertaken, the learning environment and any coping strategies and support in place. As a result, every individual with dyslexia will differ in the range of factors that are affected and in the level of severity experienced. There is however a common set of signs that can be observed.

Current research evidence states that dyslexic difficulties can occur in children and young people of all abilities. The above definition does not rely on identifying a 'discrepancy' between a child's abilities in one area and his/her abilities in others. It should, though, be recognised that children with dyslexia can demonstrate marked differences between their abilities in different areas – particularly oral versus text based skills – and that recognising their strengths can increase their success and engagement with learning. Some research shows that raising self-esteem can be as effective an intervention in improving reading as work on reading skills themselves (Lawrence, 2006).

Aims of these Guidelines and the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit'

- To ensure a shared definition of dyslexia across Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services.
- To promote the use of the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit'.
- To provide an understanding of the importance of early identification of children/young people's needs by education staff, using the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit'.
- To enable teaching and support staff to use the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit' to identify children/young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties.
- To enable teaching and support staff to use the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit' to identify good practice in supporting children with literacy difficulties from pre-school onwards.
- To ensure that interventions are evidence-based, that is, have a proven track record of success and allow ongoing evaluation.
- To promote equitable and effective teaching and learning opportunities for all children and young people.
- To ensure that for all pupils, the key features of successful support and intervention can be delivered in their local mainstream school and class.
- To promote the use of appropriate digital technology as an effective tool to support teaching and learning.
- To promote career long professional learning to develop staff skills and confidence.
- To promote effective partnership working with parents/carers and to support parents/carers to understand their child's strengths and difficulties and what schools are doing to support them.

Dyslexia Friendly Schools

Aberdeenshire Education and Children's Services promotes the use of a staged assessment and intervention approach. All locations where learning takes place are expected to be dyslexia friendly environments and to provide high quality learning and teaching for all learners.

Viewing literacy difficulties as differences in learning may help teachers to focus on lesson planning, resourcing and teaching. In a dyslexia friendly school the focus is on identifying what is right in the classroom to enhance learning effectiveness.

Dyslexia friendly schools ensure awareness among their teachers of what pupils should be able to achieve and apply a range of strategies to enable achievement. Dyslexia friendly schools understand how individuals learn best and support this with flexible teaching approaches that enable effective learning.

Schools are expected to use the 'Dyslexia in the Classroom Reflective Tool', and the 'Whole School Dyslexia Reflective Tool' in conjunction with the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit', to audit their learning environments. All staff are expected to be dyslexia aware and to provide dyslexia friendly learning and teaching.

Principles of Assessment

Within Aberdeenshire schools any assessment for possible literacy difficulties should sit within wider 'Assessment is for Learning' practices and be supported by the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit'. The primary purpose of any assessment will be to inform effective teaching and learning. Any assessment should:

- ideally be conducted over time and in relation to different contexts.
- be formative, which is to inform any future intervention. The impact of any intervention should be reviewed on a regular basis.
- involve parents/carers/child/young person/school staff as essential contributors to the process.
- consider the child/young person's strengths and development needs and generate a number of hypotheses that consider the range of issues.
- incorporate the child or young person's understanding of his/her world.
- be a collaborative process involving other professionals where necessary.

Assessment may seek information on:

- the current learning environment.
- the role that social and emotional responses play in contributing to literacy difficulties. This may include the child/young person's self-perception and self-esteem.
- the severity and persistence of difficulties with reading, writing, spelling and related areas such as maths and organisational skills.
- the key gaps in the child/young person's knowledge.
- potential reasons for the severity and persistence of difficulties in areas such as phonological awareness (sounds) and orthography (correct spelling)

There are a wide range of possible assessment materials outlined in the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit', as well as information about the process of assessment.

The Role of the Class Teacher / Early Years Practitioner

Initially the class teacher/ early years practitioner takes responsibility for recognising the possible signs of dyslexia and putting steps in place to identify the specific nature of the difficulties the child is having. A parent/carer or someone else involved with the family (e.g. social worker, health visitor) may have brought concerns to the teacher's notice. The class teacher/ early years practitioner, with help from within the school whenever appropriate, adapts learning and teaching approaches to ensure the learner's needs are met appropriately. A record is kept of the approaches that are put in place.

A basic Introduction to the 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit' is available on Aberdeenshire's online training resource, ALDO, and this is available to all teaching and non-teaching staff in schools (<http://aldo.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/login/index.php>).

The Role of Pupil Support Assistant

It is recognised that support staff have an important part to play in supporting literacy in the classroom. They may have information that could contribute to any assessment and they should bring any concerns they have to the class teacher. They may also have a role in providing targeted support to children under the supervision of teaching staff.

The Role of the Additional Support for Learning Teacher (as outlined in Aberdeenshire's 'Support Manual')

The Additional Support for Learning Teacher utilises 5 roles of support. These include:

Identification and Assessment:

- **assist class teachers in identifying additional support needs;**
- **liaise with senior managers to clarify those children and young people who are at risk of low achievement;**
- **undertake relevant assessments of learning and/or behaviour in conjunction with others as appropriate;**
- **provide useful advice and strategies to relevant staff including Pupil Support Assistants, on the basis of identification and assessment and ensure regular follow-up meetings.**

Good practice in identification and assessment supported by and/or undertaken by Additional Support for Learning Teachers is described in Section 13 of Aberdeenshire's 'Support Manual'.

Planning Learning and Teaching, Including Co-operative Teaching

Additional Support for Learning Teachers can:

- actively teach alongside the class teacher to provide all pupils with greater support and enrich the overall quality of learning and teaching;
- plan for and /or teach groups and individual pupils either in the class or in a suitable smaller attractive environment;
- on occasions, follow the teacher's plan and provide focused assistance in a planned way to pupils who have barriers to learning, whether arising from learning difficulties and/or behaviour, and enable the class teacher to work with other groups or individuals;
- provide short-term assistance to help pupils to catch up on work after a period of illness or absence;
- provide support to class teachers to develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

Consultancy / Consultation:

- give advice and guidance to class teachers, Pupil Support Assistant and senior managers on the learning and/or behaviour needs and aspects of support programmes for individual pupils;
- work with the management team and the Principal Teacher/s Support for Learning/Pupil Support to suggest ways of improving the quality and effectiveness of identification and assessment; and advise on the suitability of the learning environment; support learning and teaching throughout the school including providing advice on differentiation of the curriculum;
- work within a multi-agency context to support pupils with additional support needs;
- follow guidelines on confidentiality.

Partnership with Specialist Services:

- as part of the support team, liaise with specialist support services such as therapists, Sensory Support Service teachers, English as an Additional Language Teachers, and educational psychologists and others to help class teachers to incorporate additional or alternative strategies into the class curriculum.

Contributing to Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL):

- along with the Principal Teacher/s Support for Learning/Pupil Support, the educational psychologist, and other specialist support staff, contribute to their colleagues' professional development through providing formal and informal training on aspects of additional support needs;
- model practice and provide training for Pupil Support Assistants in practices such as the delivery of literacy and numeracy, managing motor skills, social skills or behaviour support programmes;
- provide information and advice on appropriate resource/CLPL material.

The Role of the Educational Psychologist

For a variety of reasons, many children and young people may have an additional support need at some point. Classroom teachers have the skills to recognise when a child is not making progress with aspects of literacy. At an early stage the class teacher will implement strategies to address the issues identified and consider ways of making his/her classroom 'literacy and dyslexia friendly'.

If difficulties persist, consultation with the Additional Support for Learning Teacher will identify possible courses of action. For the most part, class teachers and Additional Support for Learning Teachers are well placed to assess and plan appropriate intervention. For a small number of children/young people, however, it may be appropriate to arrange an informal consultation with the educational psychologist to jointly consider the assessment information gathered to plan the best way forward

The Educational Psychology Service has a training and development role in supporting staff to identify and support children and young people with dyslexia.

The Role of Digital Technology in a Dyslexia Friendly School

Digital technology is a useful tool available to schools for supporting pupils with literacy difficulties. It is essential that schools adopt a dyslexia friendly approach (e.g. digitisation of the curriculum) when ensuring that digital technology is embedded in teaching and learning.

The notion that 'computers are for computing' should be dispelled and instead, the computer should be viewed as a tool that underpins all classroom work. It should be as natural and easy to access a computer as it is a pencil. Although 'computer rooms' have their place, they should not replace sufficient computing capacity within the classroom and reprioritisation of resources may be needed to meet the needs of some pupils.

The 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit' points us to the need for a multisensory teaching and learning approach and within this context computers, by their very nature, provide a rich resource. Aberdeenshire Specialist Technology Service (ASPECTS) makes a number of suggestions on GLOW and ALDO on how digital technology can support learners.

Assessment Arrangements

Dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties have been defined as disabilities in UK disability legislation. Schools must therefore make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that all pupils are enabled to demonstrate their actual level of achievement despite any disability they may have.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is a national awarding body responsible for ensuring that the process of assessment leading to the certification of attainment is rigorous and fair and allows all candidates with additional support needs, including dyslexia, to demonstrate the skills and knowledge required for the award. The principles that underpin SQA's policy on alternative assessment arrangements for candidates with additional support needs are intended to ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged because of difficulties they may have in accessing the text of the exam or recording their answer.

Children and young people with dyslexia, are eligible to access alternative assessment arrangements, where evidence supports the need. The arrangements should be based on the specific needs of the individual. Schools are required to provide the SQA with details of the nature and level of support that each candidate has received in each subject class. Pupils should have the opportunity to try out alternative assessment arrangements agreed prior to sitting SQA exams. Support needs vary in different subjects and at different levels and decisions about alternative assessment arrangements should therefore be made on a subject by subject basis, with pupils and parents being involved in the process.

The range of alternative assessment arrangements available to learners with dyslexia from primary school to further education is wide and should reflect the support or strategies applied to the learning situation of the individual. Alternative assessment arrangements where appropriate, are a necessary support for any assessments at school. It is important that transition information is shared appropriately.

The need for a particular adjustment is usually identified by the pupil, subject/class teacher or member of the Additional Support for Learning team. Supporting evidence will need to be gathered and this can be discussed with the educational psychologist as part of the normal consultation procedure. Final alternative assessment arrangements will be made in consultation with the school's SQA co-ordinator and in keeping with advice issued by the SQA.

Further information on alternative assessment arrangements can be found in the document produced by the SQA (Assessment Arrangements Explained, Nov 2011 and Introduction to Assessment Arrangements for Schools and Colleges, Jan 2010). These documents outline the four stage process required to ensure that the needs of pupils are met for assessment procedures.

Transitions

It is necessary for established systems to be in place to support the transition of children and young people with literacy difficulties as they progress through their school career. Careful transition planning is especially important as children transfer from primary to secondary education.

References

'Enhancing Self-Esteem in the Classroom', Lawrence D, 3rd Edition. Paul Chapman Publishing (2006)

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