



Support for children with literacy difficulties/dyslexia



Information for families

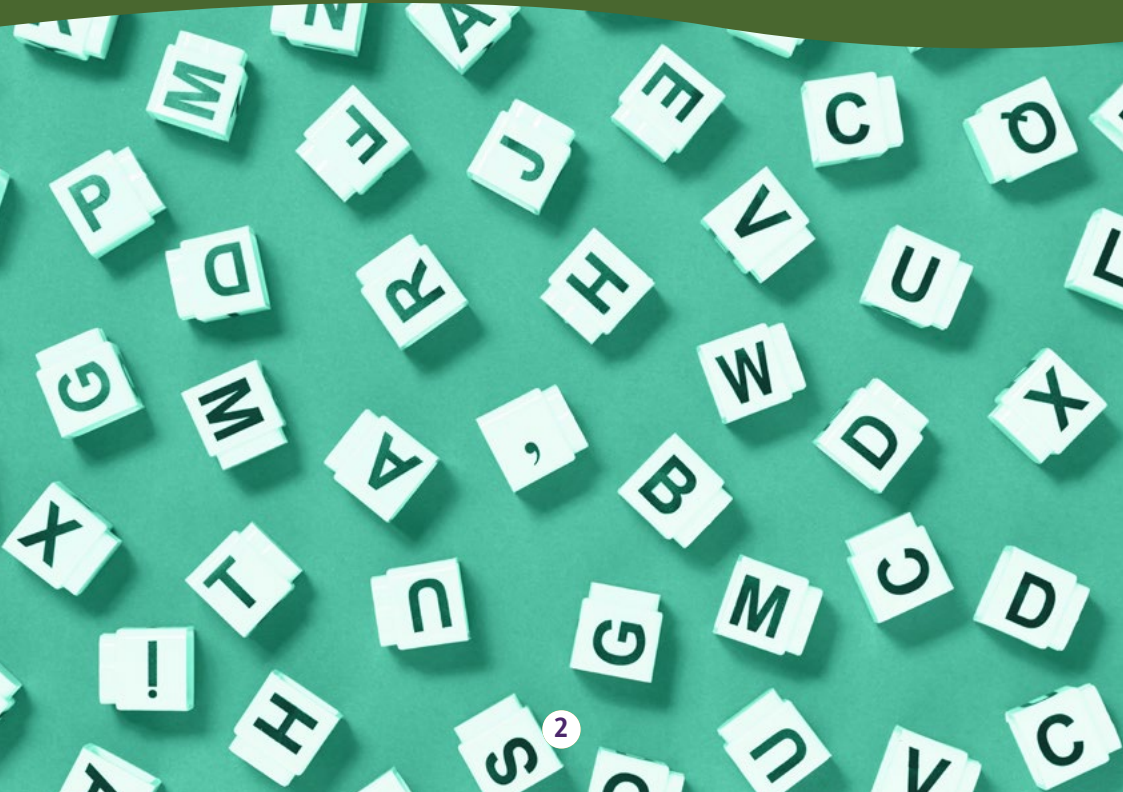
This document was co-produced by **Making Changes Together** (Durham's Parent/Carer forum) and members of **Durham's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion service.**



Literacy Difficulties/Dyslexia

Like many young people, your child might experience literacy difficulties, meaning that they find it harder than other children to learn to read and write. When people say a person has dyslexia, this also means that the person finds reading and/or writing very difficult.

Schools have many teaching methods and strategies to help your child if they struggle with literacy. If, despite this help, your child continues to experience literacy difficulties over time, or if their difficulties are significant, the school might seek further advice from an external professional (someone outside the school). This would usually involve a referral to an Advisory Inclusion Teacher (AIT) or an Educational Psychologist (EP). Durham County Council employs people in both of these roles. A referral would only be made for your child once school staff have discussed this with you.



How can my child access support from an AIT or an EP?

Schools request support with consent from parents. If school staff are concerned that your child is not progressing as well as they would expect, despite having support through school systems, they will follow the SEND Code of Practice and refer your child for additional support. If you want to ask the school to refer to external professionals, then the school SENCo is often the best person to speak to. It is important to note that schools have to balance the needs of all students with SEN, and prioritise pupils with the most difficulty.

What will an AIT or EP do to help?

AITs and EPs work together with families and schools to make sure that teaching and support in school is right for your child. However, there are a wide variety of ways that this might happen, including:

- Assessment tasks with your child to find out more about their strengths and weaknesses. This information is used to personalise support.
- Discussion about why things are difficult and what could be tried next. This would likely include asking your child about their opinions.

Will an AIT or EP give an opinion on whether my child has dyslexia?

Finding out whether a dyslexia label is appropriate for a learner does not tell us what support they need, so it is not our main focus. However, you may feel that a dyslexia label could be helpful. We can discuss a dyslexia label with you and give an opinion on whether this would be appropriate and helpful for your child.

You can say on the referral form, or in initial conversations, if you would like to discuss whether your child has dyslexia.



Describing literacy difficulties as dyslexia

What is an opinion about a dyslexia label based on?

There is no specific test for dyslexia. We will consider information available against a definition of dyslexia, for example:

“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. It provides the basis of a staged process of assessment through teaching.”

British Psychological Society definition, 1999.

Using a dyslexia label

A dyslexia label could have positive and negative effects for your child, and a cautious, personalised approach is recommended. Positive effects of a dyslexia label can include a young person seeing themselves as generally capable, despite a specific difficulty with literacy. Negative effects of a dyslexia label can include a young person feeling that progress is impossible, or that the label marks them out as different.

If your child’s literacy difficulties are severe and persistent enough to be described as dyslexia, a discussion is still needed about whether using the term dyslexia will be helpful. This discussion should take account of your child’s views, and an AIT or EP will be able to provide guidance.



What can support my child's self-esteem if they have literacy difficulties?

Emphasising to your child that they are like all people in having a mixture of strengths and weaknesses is helpful.

When young people have significant difficulty with literacy it is especially important that they get opportunities to show their strengths in activities with friends and classmates.

Whether or not you're using the term dyslexia, it is important to maintain a sense that progress and success is possible. If family members have struggled with literacy, it can be helpful to share information about how they were able to make progress and/or use strengths in other areas.

You can support your child's self-esteem by listening carefully and trying to understand what it's like for them in school. Show them that any difficult feelings they have about reading and writing are ok and acceptable.

This video can be used to help explain dyslexia to a child
www.youtube.com/watch?v=11r7CFIK2sc



Frequently asked questions

Does my child need to be assessed as having dyslexia to get the support they need in school?

No, your child has right to appropriate support for any literacy difficulties. This is the case with or without a dyslexia label. More intensive support should be available to those learners who do not make progress through initial support.

What support can I expect my child to receive at school?

Learners receive a level of support matched to their level of need. More information about this 'Graduated Approach' is available at www.durham.gov.uk/article/22253/SEN-support-and-the-graduated-approach

Support in school might include:

- A SEND Support Plan which shows targets/outcomes your child is working towards. A copy of this should be shared with you and reviewed regularly (usually termly).
- Work is differentiated according to your child's needs - this means the school should adapt the level and type of activities your child completes so they are well matched to their needs and learning progress.
- Provide regular opportunities for repetition and overlearning of key skills.
- Additional small group support and sometimes one-to-one support.
- Specific interventions, including relevant ICT support (for example Precision Teaching, Clicker, Accelerated Reader)

Resolving disagreements:

Staff in school, especially the SENCo, are the first people to speak to if you feel your child is not getting the support needed. If following this you still have concerns, Durham SENDIASS are independent of the council and provide support to families about SEN issues.

www.durhamsendiass.info/

Does a student need to be assessed as having dyslexia for access arrangements for formal tests, such as Year 6 SATs and GCSEs?

No, primary schools can apply for allowances to be made in tests if this is a pupil's normal way of working (for example if an adult reads some task materials for them).

Secondary schools can apply for some allowances on the basis that this is a student's normal way of working (for example if a student's normal practice is to have a reader). For other allowances, for example a student getting extra time, additional assessment is needed which relates directly to the allowance. In the example of an extra time allowance, assessment of processing speed or handwriting speed could provide evidence, but the young person does not need to be assessed as having dyslexia.

Does a student need to be assessed as having dyslexia to receive Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) at college or university?

No, to support an application for DSA on the basis of literacy difficulties, an assessment by an appropriately qualified professional is needed. Applications where a disability is described as 'Dyslexia' and 'Specific Learning Difficulties' can both be accepted.



More Information

If you would like more detail about Durham County Council's policy on supporting children with Literacy Difficulties, please see the document titled "Literacy difficulties/dyslexia in young people. How we support assessment, intervention and positive dialogue". This has been made available to school SENCo's.

Glossary

Advisory Inclusion Teacher (AIT). A Qualified Teacher with specialist knowledge about one or more types of special educational need (e.g. literacy difficulties). These teachers work with a wide range of schools, rather than being employed by one school. Durham County Council employs AITs who help schools with literacy difficulties, in the Cognition and Learning Team.

Differentiation. The process of altering tasks in school to make them more helpful for your child. This could involve providing extra useful information or adult support. It could also involve increasing or decreasing the difficulty level of the task to make it challenging but achievable.

Educational Psychologist (EP). A psychologist with formal training about all kinds of special educational needs (SEN), including literacy difficulties. Durham County Council employs EPs in the Educational Psychology Service.

Overlearning. A teaching method where a student practices something until they can do it quickly and easily. For many students this helps learning to 'stick' in their memory for longer.

SENCo. The teacher in a school who plays a lead role in organising support for pupils with special educational needs.

SEND Code of Practice. A guidance document published by the government in 2015. It gives information about how schools should support pupils with special educational needs.