Teaching Children and Young People with Literacy Difficulties

Practice Guidance

April 2022

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1. Introduction

1.1 This guidance reflects Surrey County Council's commitment to early identification and effective, targeted intervention for all children and young people with literacy difficulties, including those with a diagnosis of dyslexia.

1.2 The purpose of this guidance is to provide clear information about effective teaching, learning and assessment related to reading, writing and spelling.

1.3 It is based on principles of promoting:

- Early intervention to ensure timely support
- High quality teaching and interventions based on current research and evidence
- Good quality assessment over time to inform effective targeted intervention
- Fair access to available resources for all children (The Equality Act, 2010)

1.4 The guidance outlines:

- Recent research in relation to the identification of literacy difficulties and evidence-based interventions
- Guidance on how literacy needs may be best met in schools
- The provision available in Surrey for meeting these needs

2. Literacy

2.1 Literacy is a core skill which underpins all curriculum areas and enables access to the broad and balanced curriculum.

2.2 Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. There are many different interacting skills needed in order to become literate. These include phonological awareness, the ability to decode words, read fluently, read for meaning, spelling, handwriting and written composition, as well as other associated processes, such as oral language skills.

3. Development of Literacy Skills

3.1 Children acquire literacy skills at different ages and at differing rates, and as a result start school with varying levels of literacy (Wolf, 2008).

3.2 Early years education should provide language enriched environments and regular access to quality stories, books, songs and rhyme. There should be a focus on the following skills to provide the foundation for literacy skills and learning to read:

- An interest in books and a motivation to read – this can be encouraged by children having access to a wide range of books and literature and being regularly read to.
- A wide vocabulary (knowledge of words, sound structure and meaning) – this can be encouraged by talking about vocabulary in the books that are being shared and using this in discussions and day to day interactions with children.

- An awareness of print (knowing that print conveys meaning and that in English words are written and read from left to right) – this can be encouraged by touching the words as they are read, reading words in a range of contexts and purposes and discussing their meaning.
- Phonological awareness (ability to recognise individual sounds and put them together to make words and recognise a word and split it into individual sounds) – this can be encouraged by playing oral word games such as I spy, what's the word (listen to the sounds and state the word [synthesis]) and what are the sounds (listen to the word and state the sounds [segmentation]).
- Phonics instruction – this enables children to learn the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language.

3.3   After a period of teaching, some children may demonstrate difficulty in learning to read, write and spell. If difficulties persist, this can lead to considerable distress and, in some cases, result in academic disengagement. It is important that delays are identified and addressed as soon as possible. Early identification and intervention for literacy difficulties with young children have to date been shown to be more effective than interventions for older children (Denton & Vaughn, 2010).

4. Skill-based, contextual assessment over time

4.1   When a child or young person is not making expected progress in their literacy skills teachers are well placed to complete an accurate assessment to identify the specific areas of literacy that need improving and plan appropriate intervention. These assessments should explore:

- phonological awareness and phonic skills
- word reading accuracy, fluency, and generalisation
- reading comprehension
- spelling
- writing

4.2   Detailed reading assessment materials that measure accuracy, fluency and generalisation are available at no cost through Surrey's Literacy for All programme (Ward, Crawford & Solity, 2017), available through the Specialist Teachers for Inclusive Practice and Educational Psychology Services. This information can be used as a baseline assessment and to inform the intervention planning. It can also be used as a tool to measure progress and to evaluate the effectiveness of literacy interventions in place.

4.3   Assessment over time and monitoring of the child or young person's response to teaching is now accepted as the most effective way of identifying literacy difficulties (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003; Colenbrander et al 2018), informing intervention and determining the rate of progress (Snowling & Hulme, 2011); and signalling appropriate resourcing needs (Miciak & Fletcher, 2020).

4.4   Developing accurate and fluent literacy skills takes time and is also affected by various aspects of a pupil's experiences. A range of factors should be investigated as part of an assessment of a pupil's difficulty, including:

- Environment
- Learning opportunities and experiences
- Language skills
- Emotional well-being, confidence and motivation
- Experience of intervention and support

4.5 Where it is identified that a pupil needs support which is additional to or different from that which is available for the majority of their peers, a SEND Support Arrangements plan should be started.

5. Identifying difficulties and assessing for intervention

5.1 Surrey County Council recognise that some children and young people continue to have significant and persistent difficulties with literacy, impacting on accurate and fluent word reading and spelling, despite high quality teaching. We are committed to supporting all these children and recognise that different terms can be used to describe these needs, such as specific literacy difficulties or dyslexia. The DfE SEND Code of Practice (6.31, 2015) uses the term Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) which encompasses a range of conditions, including dyslexia, that impact on learning. Difficulties occur on a continuum rather than a clear category and there are currently no specific criteria.

Research agrees on effective teaching approaches for those who have reading and spelling difficulties. Those struggling to acquire literacy skills typically need more individualised, more structured, more explicit, more systematic, and more intense literacy input.

5.2 Surrey County Council advocates the assess, plan, do, review approach of assessment for intervention and teaching to be used to guide assessment, teaching, intervention, and resourcing for the following reasons:

- Assessment over time identifies any child or young person who is not making the expected literacy progress, where their response to intervention is monitored, and provides the necessary information required to plan further intervention;
- There is no universally agreed definition or assessment pathway for dyslexia so diagnosis is dependent on the interpretation made by the professional completing the assessment (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2014);
- Research shows that a diagnosis determined by the discrepancy between a child or young person's intelligence and their reading ability is not scientifically valid as reading is not dependent on intelligence (Stanovich, 1994);
- Research demonstrates that the key elements of an effective intervention for children and young people with reading difficulties (including those identified with dyslexia) are the same for all, regardless of intelligence;
- A diagnosis of dyslexia does not provide additional information to the school (over and above that gathered through effective assessment and identification of an individual's literacy difficulties) that is useful for addressing the needs nor does it predict the rate or likelihood of progress (Snowling & Hulme, 2011);
- Despite substantial advances in the use of neuroscience and genetics in reading research these do not yet provide any insight to inform diagnosis and intervention.

6. The use of cognitive assessments in connection with literacy difficulties

6.1 Additional assessments are sometimes completed by specialist teachers and/or educational psychologists, who may use tests of cognitive functioning and general intelligence. These tests sometimes show that children and young people with literacy difficulties also have difficulties with cognitive processes such as memory, processing and language. These difficulties tend to be more common in children with literacy difficulties, although there is no clear and consistent pattern. These assessments may also identify particular strengths in one or more of these areas. Cognitive assessments can be useful for overall educational planning and ensuring that there is the appropriate level of intellectual challenge in lessons. Assessments of cognitive skills do not provide the specific information needed to plan literacy interventions or to predict progress in literacy (Astle, Bathelt & Holmes, 2019). The information derived from one off individual assessments in isolation is rarely sufficient to draw reliable conclusions but should be considered alongside other assessment information gathered over time.

7. Support in the classroom and specific literacy intervention

7.1 **Planning support**

When planning a support package in literacy it is important to consider all the following:

- The emotional well-being and confidence of the child or young person and their motivation to engage and learn
- The child/young person's ability to understand the content of lessons and the need for support within lesson to access the curriculum
- The child/young person's individual literacy skills and the need for a specific literacy intervention
- Entitlement to fair and equitable access to appropriate support that will maximise their ability to progress

7.2 **Emotional well-being, confidence, and motivation**

The emotional well-being and confidence of the child/young person should always be at the forefront of both class-based support and intervention planning. This should be done by involving the child/young person in understanding their difficulties, in the planning of their additional support, using motivating real books and literature of their choice and ensuring that they are fully informed about the purpose of the support and their rate of progress.

The focus of this approach is to provide the child/young person with evidence of their effort and progress to maintain their emotional well-being and raise their self-confidence. Ensuring that learning is suitably matched to skill levels will maximise learning, motivation and feelings of success.

7.3 **Support in the classroom - Curriculum access**

Accurate curriculum-based assessments alongside literacy skills assessments will determine whether the child or young person needs support across all areas of the curriculum or primarily in the areas that have a high literacy component. It is important that teachers do not under or overestimate the intellectual ability of their students and their literacy difficulties are not a barrier to their knowledge and progress in the curriculum area (Elliott & Nicholson, 2016).

In addition to high quality teaching, reasonable evidence-based adjustments can be considered to compensate for any literacy difficulties. These could include alternative methods of supporting reading (e.g. reading pens, readers) and alternative methods of recording (e.g. scribes, touch typing, Dictaphones, voice-activated software). However, the circumstances under which they are used needs to be carefully considered, their impact systematically monitored and only introduced after full consultation with the child or young person. Access arrangements for exams can also be sought by the educational provider if required for the child or young person.

7.4 Specific literacy intervention – Skill development

An accurate assessment of literacy skills is required to identify the specific areas to address. The content of the intervention will depend on the areas of literacy causing concern and their associated pre-requisite skills. Please refer to Table 1 in the Appendix for further details.

Following the assessment of literacy skills, an intervention scheme may be identified as an appropriate next step. Schools need to ensure that any intervention is evidence based and that the effectiveness of the intervention is evaluated after a period of time. If further assessment shows that the child or young person has not made adequate progress, a more personalised, bespoke intervention may be needed.

It is important that the teaching methods used within any intervention are shown to be effective through quality research. Research emphasises that focusing on how and what children and young people are taught is more important than school structures, organisation, or where they are taught. If the teaching is structured well this is more effective than other factors such as ability grouping, class size, individualised teaching and resource expenditure (Hattie, 2009).

7.5 Evidence base for Effective Teaching

Research shows that teaching is most effective when it includes the following:

- Distributed practice, i.e. short, frequent teaching sessions, that incorporate practice of identified skills and address areas such as memory deficits (Baddeley, 1997). The more often children and young people practise a skill the more likely it is to be mastered (Moreira, Pinto, Starling & Jaegar, 2019);
    - o An example of this would be that a short, focussed intervention of 5 minutes a day is more effective than two 20 minute sessions a week;

- Teaching of skills to fluency and generalisation, as well as accuracy (Haring & Eaton, 1978) by ensuring that there are sufficient opportunities for children and young people to practise the skills before moving on;

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- An example of this would be expecting children to read known words (old learning) quicker and giving them opportunities to practise these;

- Teaching of skills to generalisation in order to ensure that children and young people can apply their skills, knowledge and concepts to different contexts (Solity, 2015). Pupils are more likely to read and understand the meaning of words accurately if they see a word in a more diverse contexts (Adelman, Brown & Quesada, 2006; Nation, 2017);
  - An example of this would be the use of 'real books' that include a varied, diverse and extensive reading experience rather than the over-reliance on books that contain highly decodable texts.

- A structured approach that ensures one new skill is taught at a time (Solity, 2008);
  - An example of this would be targeting the reading of certain words rather than targeting reading and spelling of the words together.

- More frequently occurring skills are taught before less useful skills (Carnine, Silbert & Kameenui, 1997);
  - An example of this would be teaching the first 100 most common words first as they account for over 54% of written English and not the next 100 words which only account for a further 5% Solity, 2020; Solity & vousden, 2009);

- Tasks that are interleaved i.e. mixing old and new skills (Rohrer & Pashler, 2017; Brown 1998), minimise forgetting (Baddeley, 1997). All new learning should be made explicit;
  - An example of this would be teaching new spelling words and then going over words already learnt rather than having new spellings each week and not including any words previously learnt.

- The use of the direct instruction teaching approach (Engelmann & Carnine, 1982) and errorless learning principles , to introduce and practise skills;
  - An example of this is the use of the Model-Lead-Test teaching method (my turn, together, your turn) when teaching any new skills or correcting errors – the instructor models correct responses for children to repeat with support until accurate and independent recall is achieved.

- Ensuring children and young people are fully informed about the purpose of interventions, their achievements and rate of progress (Adelman, Gordon, Brown & Quesada, 2006);
  - An example of this is explaining why you are teaching the first 100 words and then discuss the progress with the child or young person.

- Peer-assisted learning (The Sutton Trust, 2013);
  - Examples of this would be Paired Reading (Topping, 1995) and Co-operative Learning (Kagan & Kagan, 2015);

- Utilising teaching assistants to implement well-founded interventions (Adelman et al, 2006);
  - An example of this would be training some teaching assistants in Precision Teaching to implement across the school for all children who need it.

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7.6 Research also indicates the crucial role vocabulary knowledge and oral language skills play in the reading process (Hulme, Snowling, Caravolas & Carrol, 1995). The explicit teaching of vocabulary to support the development of children's spoken and written language, as well as teacher language usage in the classroom, should always be considered when planning any reading intervention. This should always be in the context of access to good quality literature, and teaching staff who aim to increase the enjoyment of reading through encouraging children and young people to discover and connect with books of their choice.

7.7 Cognitive interventions, including memory training, and other complementary measures, such as targeting visual processing through the use of coloured lenses, have yet to demonstrate consistent effectiveness in improving reading skills (Pennington, 2011; Henderson, Tsogka & Snowling, 2013). With the exception of phonological awareness, addressing cognitive processes, such as working memory, in order to improve literacy attainments, is not supported in the scientific literature (Velluntino, Fletcher, Snowling & Scanlon, 2004; Hempenstall, 2019).

7.8 The multi-sensory teaching approach is often referred to as a core feature of specialist dyslexia intervention. Children use their hearing, vision and touch when learning to read and write, however beyond this, research does not support the use of any specific multi-sensory approaches to specifically improve reading and writing (Brooks, 2007).

8. Framework for support

8.1 The Code of Practice (2014) provides statutory guidance for organisations that work with children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), on duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. The Code stipulates a process of Assess, Plan, Do, Review in identifying and meeting children and young people's SEND needs. This is also referred to as the Graduated Response.

8.2 The Literacy for All: Assessment through Teaching (ATT) model (Ward, Crawford & Solity, 2017; Solity, 1993) provides a rigorous framework for the Assess, Plan, Do, Review process. It supports teachers and teaching assistants in monitoring the child/young person's access to the curriculum and response to a skill-based intervention. This takes into account assessments over time and emphasises the importance of analysing the teaching when reviewing a child/young person's progress. Table 2 in the Appendix illustrates how this model is used to address literacy needs.

9. Provision in Surrey

9.1 The majority of children and young people's needs in this area should be met within the graduated response as described in the SEND Code of Practice within mainstream schools via SEND Support Arrangements. It is the school's statutory responsibility to meet these needs from their own resources via their delegated budget. Most children and young people's needs are met using a structured and systematic framework within school that

incorporates the recommendations detailed above to varying intensity, in line with Surrey guidance (please refer to Surrey Profile of Need and Graduated Response).

9.2   Supporting literacy development across learning is the responsibility of all teachers. This is clearly reflected in the Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (January 2015).

"Teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress and development of the pupils in their class… 6.36

High quality teaching, differentiated for individual pupils, is the first step in responding to pupils who have or may have learning needs. 6.37" (p.99)

9.3   Schools can access advice and support from specialist support services in line with the Surrey Graduated Response and at different levels of the Profile of Need. These include Specialist Teachers for Inclusive Practice, Educational Psychologists, Inclusion Outreach, Speech and Language Therapists and the Physical and Sensory Support Service. Support from these services includes assessing individual pupil needs, advising on strategies to support access to the curriculum, and recommending appropriate targets, strategies and evidenced based interventions to meet individual needs. Services can work closely with school staff to support the delivery of interventions, ensuring that they are effective and appropriate. A range of training packages are also available to promote effective support for pupils with literacy, cognition and learning needs.

9.4   Very occasionally, significant concerns about a pupil's literacy levels and progress continue despite a rigorous graduated response using the Assess, Plan, Do, Review framework that has incorporated advice and recommendations from specialist support services. In such cases, further assessment can be requested from the Local Authority through an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment, in line with the SEND Code of Practice. This may indicate the need for additional resources that can only be delivered via an EHC Plan.

9.5   If an EHC Plan is in place, monitoring of the child or young person's progress is achieved through the Annual Review process. Effective assessment and intervention continue to be essential. The responsibility transfers to the Local Authority, in partnership with parents/carers and schools.

10. Partnership with Parents/Carers

10.1   Children and young people's literacy needs are best met when schools and parents/carers work in partnership, where there is mutual trust and where information is shared. In line with the SEND Code of Practice, parents/carers must be included in discussions and fully informed about the Assess, Plan, Do, Review process undertaken in school to meet literacy needs. The SEND Advice Surrey are available (Tel: 01737 737300; email: SENDAdvice@surreycc.gov.uk; website: sendadvicesurrey.org.uk) to help parents/carers access appropriate and independent advice and support in all areas of SEND. In addition, the Local Offer website offers support for parents.

Appendix 1

Table 1: Areas of literacy and corresponding intervention

Area of concern identified	Recommended focus of the intervention
Word reading	Synthesis – the ability to recognise individual sounds and put them together to make the word Systematic phonic intervention that focuses on the most frequently occurring grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) in written English Sight vocabulary intervention that focuses on the most frequently occurring phonically irregular words Vocabulary Generalising reading skills to real books and learning contexts
Comprehension	Word Reading to accuracy and fluency Oral language skills The following skills: literal, inference, summarising, simplifying syntactic and semantic complexities, critical skills, study skills The following knowledge: vocabulary, facts, reasoning skills, logic, schemata, syntax, specific topic knowledge
Spelling	Segmentation - the ability to discriminate a word and separate it into the individual sounds Writing letters to dictation Phonic, whole word, morphemic spelling interventions

	Generalising spelling skills into independent writing/recording
Writing	Motor Skills
	Letter formation
	Word formation
	Writing sentences
	Oral language skills

Table 2: Using the Assessment Through Teaching Model to Address Literacy Difficulties

Steps of Assessment Through Teaching Model to Address Literacy Difficulties		Practical Implications
Step 1: ASSESS	Baseline literacy assessment	Assessment to include: • Standardised assessments (e.g. reading ages) • Curriculum-based assessments (school assessments) • Skill-based assessments (Literacy for All reading and spelling accuracy and fluency assessments)
Step 2: PLAN	Instructional content: Deciding what to teach	Organise whole class teaching so that: • What is being taught is clear; • Task analysis caters for all cognitive and linguistic skill levels. Organise interventions so that: • Accurate assessment has been completed to identify the areas of literacy that need targeting; • The focus is on skills that are most useful and highly generalisable; • Skills that are readily confused are separated; • One skill is being identified to teach; • The most useful skills are taught first. Teach meta-cognitive skills so that: • Children understand what is being taught and why. • Children can think and talk about their own learning and progress.
Step 3: PLAN/DO	Instructional delivery: Deciding how to teach	Organise whole class teaching so that: • Reasonable adjustments are in place to enable all students to access (read) and produce (write) the written word using alternative methods of reading and recording as required. Whole class teaching is made explicit across the range of cognitive and linguistic skills through:

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		• Clear differentiation; • Reducing task demand to match need; • Direct instruction; • Use of questioning and feedback. Organise specialist interventions so that: • One skill at a time is taught; • All skills are taught to high levels of fluency (practice); • New skills are taught directly and explicitly; • Skills are taught in a range of contexts; • Old and new learning are mixed.
Step 4: DO	Classroom organisation	Organise the learning environment so that: • All teaching staff are trained in determining what to teach and how to teach it; • Alternative methods for reading and recording are accessible; • Students are grouped amongst peers with a range of skill levels; • There are frequent opportunities for practice; • Teaching assistants and peers are used to the greatest effect.
Step 5: REVIEW	Assess and evaluate learning	Ensure that the access to the curriculum is evaluated by assessing the effectiveness of the reasonable adjustments. Ensure that evaluation of interventions includes assessment of: • Accuracy, fluency and generalisation; • New and old learning. Ensure that children and young people are aware of their progress and the next steps in moving learning forward.

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