

A guide for parents/carers who are concerned that their child may be dyslexic

What is Dyslexia?

In the past there have been many different definitions of dyslexia, but the most recent research (the Rose Report 2009) says:

- **Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading.**
- Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.
- Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.
- Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in some aspects of language, motor coordination, 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.**

Dyslexia is a **learning difference** which makes it more difficult to develop reading and spelling skills and teachers need to adapt how they organise and teach to use the child's strengths. Children with dyslexia have strengths in the creative way they think and solve problems; they may be skilled at sports, they may also be artistic and good with their hands and visual imagination. Many famous people are dyslexic including Walt Disney, Richard Branson, Keira Knightley, Johnny Depp and Jamie Oliver.

It is very important that the child's strengths are used to help their learning and maintain their self-esteem and emotional well-being at school and at home.

What should I do if I think my child might have dyslexia?

- You should arrange to see your child's teacher or the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) to talk about your concerns.

What should the school do?

- The teacher or SENCO will listen to your concerns and discuss with you the "Worcestershire Dyslexia Pathways" which is the guide used in Worcestershire to help us identify whether or not a child has dyslexia, (this is based on the most up to date research and legislation on how best to identify children with dyslexia). There are a number of reasons why a child might be having problems with reading or spelling, not due to dyslexia, but other reasons to do with their health and general development.

- The class teacher will be asked to highlight the list of common characteristics of children with dyslexia to see which, if any, apply to your child. If 50% or more apply to your child, then they might be showing traits of dyslexia and school will start using the Dyslexia Pathway to guide them with how to support your child and to check what interventions could help them catch up.

Starting the Dyslexia Pathway: Quality First Teaching

- The class teacher and/or SENCO will find out in more detail from you about your child's development, by completing a parental interview with you.
- They will also go through the PACE checklist with you, which is a set of questions which look at or rules out, other reasons why your child may be having difficulties with literacy. It looks at:
 - **Physical factors**, for example if they have poor eyesight they might not be able to see the text properly, or have/have had hearing difficulties e.g. glue ear and cannot hear the sounds in speech clearly
 - **Affective factors** (emotional), for example if your child is very worried by something they will not be able to concentrate on learning to read
 - **Cognitive factors** (how your child thinks and learns), for example some children have difficulties with attention, which might be getting in the way of learning to read
 - **Educational factors**. For example if your child has missed a lot of school they might be behind because they haven't had as much teaching as a lot of other children.

Your child's teacher will also collect information about how your child is doing in their other subjects at school to build up your child's "learning profile" (what they are good at and what they find more difficult).

Your child will also be asked for their views about how they feel they are getting on, what helps them learn and what they enjoy.

The class teacher will work with the SENCO to adapt the way they teach (Quality First Teaching) for the whole class, to help your child achieve using their strengths as well as supporting their weaker areas of learning and ensuring some extra help to develop weaker skills. This is part of the graduated response approach from the Special Needs Code of Practice 2014 which says that schools have to help children 'close the gap' by looking at their needs, planning support, doing it and then reviewing their progress e.g. Assess, Plan, Do, Review

Continuing on the Dyslexia Pathway (Wave two, Wave three support)

If your child continues to fall behind and not make the hoped for progress your child will be put on the school's Special Needs Register (the list of children in the school with special needs) and will have an Individual Provision Map (IPM) or Individual Education Plan (IEP) or equivalent, which is a document which lists what extra help your child is being given to help them to improve their literacy skills. It includes specific targets that the school are helping them to achieve. This may be additional help in a small group called Wave two support and/or very specific individual support called Wave three. This document should also suggest what you can do at home to help your child.

After a period of time (usually around a term) your child's teacher and the SENCO will review your child's progress to see what difference the extra support has made. This extra support might be:

- extra literacy teaching in a group
- the teacher giving your child different work in class
- extra tasks for you to do with your child at home.

At this point if your child is making good progress, they will no longer need to be on the Dyslexia Pathway.

What if my child hasn't improved after the review?

The SENCO and teacher would think of other ways to help your child and then review their progress again.

What if my child still hasn't made much progress?

The school may then ask an outside specialist such as a specialist Learning Support Teacher for advice and they may carry out some further assessments to look in more detail at your child's reading, spelling and other learning skills.

There is no specific test for dyslexia, as dyslexia is identified by how much progress a child makes despite being given the correct support over time, the learning support teacher will not usually be able to tell you whether or not your child is dyslexic straight away.

The Learning Support Teacher will make recommendations to the class teacher and SENCO about further strategies they think will help your child and school will write another IPM/IEP to include these suggestions. This will be reviewed (usually after around a term) to see if this has helped your child to make progress.

How is it decided if my child is dyslexic?

If your child is still only making minimal progress despite expert advice and high quality support in school, then the school will ask the professionals who have been involved in helping your child to come to a "**Dyslexia Decision Meeting**". These meetings are generally held when the child is about to transfer to another school or when they are in Year 5 or above. At this meeting they look at all the information school have gathered on your child and in particular the evidence of the progress they have made **over time** in spite of having been given good support. In order for a dyslexia decision meeting to take place, your child usually needs to have had 3 IEPs or equivalent and reviews. (If your child is in the upper end of Key stage 2 or older, and their difficulties have not been identified lower down the school, then they may be "fast tracked" to a Dyslexia Decision Meeting without having to wait for these to take place.

After this meeting the SENCO will let you know the decision of the meeting and discuss with you further ideas to help your child to make progress and access the curriculum. This will be reviewed by the school on a regular basis.

What happens if my child is not identified as having dyslexia?

The professionals will suggest other reasons why your child might not be making progress and let you know what can be done to help your child. They may also suggest other support or extra individual or group work and ask to repeat the Dyslexia Decision Meeting after this has been completed.

What happens if my child is identified as having dyslexia?

The school staff and professionals will make further suggestions of ways to help your child make as much progress as possible. They will also look at the use of technology to help your child access the curriculum and achieve at their ability level and not just their literacy level.

Will my child get an Education, Health and Care Plan now they have been identified as dyslexic?

No, not usually. In Worcestershire, schools give support to most dyslexic pupils without the need for a plan. Only children with the greatest levels of difficulty would be given a plan. These are usually children whose literacy skills are at least 3-4 years behind (in key stage 2) or 4-6 years behind (in key stage 3). Even then, a plan is normally only given to children who would need more than 20 hours extra support each week which is much more than most dyslexic children would need.

What sort of support could I expect my dyslexic child to be given in school?

Recommendations on support for your child will be made in the report after the Dyslexia Decision Meeting. The sort of support your child will get in school will depend on their age and severity of their difficulties, but in general your child will be helped in two different ways.

Firstly they will be given some extra teaching to **help improve their literacy skills**. This might be in a small group or individually, but will be specifically tailored to your child's needs. Your child's progress will be reviewed regularly to make sure they are improving.

Secondly your child will be helped to **make sure they can understand the lessons and show what they know without their dyslexia getting in the way**. This is called "Overcoming the barriers to learning".

This will include ways of making sure they can understand all the books, worksheets, and writing on the board. A few examples of this are:

- Working with another child who can read it to them
- Being given written information in a simpler way
- Having a recorded version so they can listen instead of having to read
- Using diagrams
- Using a computer program which reads the text to them
- Pastel colour paper
- A teaching assistant (TA) reading to them.
- They should also be given other ways to show what they know, rather than having to do a large amount of writing. A few examples of this are:



- Using diagrams and drawings instead of writing
- Having to do less writing e.g. single word answers/filling in the blanks
- Using mind maps
- Dictating to an adult
- Using a Dictaphone or digital recorder
- Use of computers or similar technology
- Parent writing/typing the homework.

What should I do if I don't feel my child is getting enough/the right support at school?

Make an arrangement to talk to the SENCO at your child's school, but if you are still concerned you can contact SEND Information, Advice & Support Service who will talk with you about how to ensure your child is getting the help they need.

How can I get a copy of the Worcestershire Dyslexia Pathways?

You can ask your school SENCO if you could look at their hard copy. All schools were sent one in 2010. The original version is now out of print and the update was due by the end of 2014 but the original is available on CD from:

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