

Dyslexia: The Nottinghamshire Approach (2023)



**Nottinghamshire
County Council**

PREFACE

Nottinghamshire County Council issued its original guidance to schools in 1993. This guidance has since been updated four times, in 1997, 2002, 2014 and 2023. These revisions have taken account of changes to legislation as well as to the ongoing developments in technology, best practice, and the growing understanding of what works well in the field of dyslexia, including:

- Eastup L., Gregory J., *Dyslexia Friendly Schools Good Practice Guide* (2018) British Dyslexia Association
- Education Endowment Foundation (2021) *Special Educational Needs in the Mainstream Classroom*. Available at https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/eef-guidance-reports/send/EEF_Special_Educational_Needs_in_Mainstream_Schools_Guidance_Report.pdf?v=1635355222
- HM Government (2015) *SEND Code of practice: 0 to 25 years*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>
- HM Government (2022) *SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time*. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063620/SEND_review_right_support_right_place_right_time_accessible.pdf
- Joint Council for Qualifications (2022) *Access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special considerations* available at <https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/>

- Ofsted (2021) *Supporting SEND*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-send/supporting-send>
- Rose, J (2009) *Identifying and teaching children and young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties* Annesley: DCSF Publications.
- The Children and Families Act (2014) available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents>
- The Equality Act (2010) available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- Working Party of the Division of Educational and Child Psychology of The British Psychological Society (1999) *Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment*, Leicester: British Psychological Society

In updating this guidance, the County Council has consulted with colleagues in the Schools and Families Specialist Services (SFSS) and the Educational Psychology Service. It is to be read alongside the **Nottinghamshire Guide to Dyslexia Friendly Schools**, which provides practical ideas to support the approach outlined in this document.

Nottinghamshire schools can apply for the **Nottinghamshire Dyslexia Friendly Schools Quality Mark**. For more information on this, and all other subjects contained in this guidance, contact Bridget Thornhill, Senior Teacher for Dyslexia bridget.thornhill@nottscc.gov.uk



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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading, writing and spelling are complex skills and children vary in how quickly they develop accuracy and fluency with the printed word.

Difficulties in acquiring these basic skills are a serious matter for concern and need to be addressed, whatever the underlying causes. Such difficulties can leave children ill-prepared for life in the community and may deny them the opportunity to fully develop intellectually and emotionally. By creating a safe and appropriate learning environment for the child, the above may be avoided.

2. WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

Defining Dyslexia

Whilst acknowledging the many definitions of dyslexia from a range of organisations over time, Nottinghamshire County Council endorses the following definition:

- 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.

Source: Rose (2009)

In endorsing this definition, the County Council is accepting that the 'discrepancy model' of dyslexia is not sufficient on its own to establish the existence of dyslexia. **Dyslexia exists independently of other measures of intellectual functioning. A learner does not need to have particular strengths in other areas to be described as dyslexic.** We also recognise that dyslexia may develop as a result of post-natal

factors such as undiagnosed hearing difficulties in early childhood, and that its lifetime effects vary considerably between individuals.

The Rose definition defines dyslexia as a learning difficulty. We prefer the term learning difference, a combination of strengths and weaknesses, which affects the learning process in reading, spelling, writing and sometimes numeracy. Learners with dyslexia may also have accompanying weaknesses in short term memory, sequencing, and the speed at which they process information. These are skills that everyone needs if they are to learn effectively in a busy classroom. They are also key skills for life.

There will be some pupils whose dyslexia is an aspect of other special educational needs which they have in addition to their dyslexia. There will be other pupils whose dyslexia stands within the context of high abilities with regard to the understanding of complex concepts. For **all** pupils with dyslexia it is vital for teachers to look for the pupil's strengths in learning, and to use these to develop suitable teaching approaches.

Roles and Responsibilities

In all but exceptional circumstances the needs of pupils with dyslexia will be met in mainstream schools without the need for an Education, Health and Care Plan. Provision for most pupils with dyslexia will be made from the school's own resources, where necessary, with advice from the County Council's support services on how best to make and develop this provision. Schools should follow the processes outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (2015) in monitoring the provision it makes for pupils with dyslexia. This should include the involvement of parents/carers, the pupil concerned, and where appropriate, voluntary and other professional organisations.

The working definition of dyslexia, described previously, locates the responsibility for the initial identification of dyslexia within the expected skills and knowledge of schools. The County Council acknowledges its ongoing responsibility to support its schools in developing effective school-based identification, assessment, intervention and monitoring of the provision made for pupils with dyslexia. Advice, training and support is available from the Schools and Families Specialist Services (SFSS) and in more complex cases, schools and the SFSS have access to support from the Educational Psychology Service.

SFSS may:

- Contribute to staff development by providing dyslexia training for staff on the identification, assessment and support for pupils with dyslexia.
- Consult with school staff and parents/carers to explore interventions that have been put in place, look at pupil assessment information and make further recommendations on teaching and learning strategies.
- They may work with school staff to achieve a better understanding of barriers to learning.
- They may observe pupils in their settings and occasionally work directly with pupils to better understand their needs.

SFSS Cognition & Learning Team Criteria for Support

The criteria for accessing support from the Cognition & Learning Team are set out below:

Pupils in KS2 to KS5 who:

- Live within Nottinghamshire and / or attend a Nottinghamshire school.
- Have needs that are considered to be severe and complex and have a significant impact on their cognitive abilities.
- Have needs that are likely to be life-long or may be life limiting.
- Are likely also to have difficulties with a range of other skills such as coordination, self help, communication and social development
- Attainment is likely to be within Pre- key stage standards (below 4 in Primary and below 6 in Secondary).
- Are making very little or a very slow rate of progress even with high levels of intervention and support.
- Require a highly differentiated / individualised curriculum and provision.

In addition to the above criteria, priority will be given to those children where:

- There are significant safeguarding issues.
- There is high risk of permanent exclusion.
- The placement is at risk of breaking down or there are complex transitional issues.
- The child is looked after by the local authority and has SEN.

- There is significant lack of parental and/or school confidence in the provision.
- Parents/carers or school may be considering requesting a Statutory Assessment.

The school or setting must be able to show evidence of a graduated response from the SEN Code of practice, make clear their current and previously tried interventions and show that they have sought appropriate support from the Family Network.

There may also be a significant gap between the knowledge / skills / experience of school or setting staff and the child's needs which is likely to be seen as a priority.

Schools and Families of Schools are expected to make the first response to meet the needs of learners with dyslexia. They may request training or support to develop systems to meet the needs of pupils. Individual request for pupils with more complex profiles in exceptional circumstances may be appropriate but they are likely to meet the criteria above.

Placement at risk could mean challenges with curriculum provision such that the pupil's placement may break down due to the level of individualisation needed.

3. IDENTIFYING AND ASSESSING DYSLEXIA

Assessing dyslexia and providing appropriate support are symbiotic processes. Assessment and support are linked. The assessment of dyslexic learners in schools:

- Is a dynamic process rather than an end-product. The information provided in the assessment/screening should support the learner's next steps for learning.
- Should be a holistic and collaborative process which takes place over a period of time.
- Should include consultation and actively involve teachers/school staff, management, parents/carers, pupils and other agencies when there are concerns about pupil progress.
- Should include the gathering of information from varied sources in order to identify the needs of a learner and to suggest appropriate interventions, support and planning.
- Should support learners to become successful learners and confident individuals.

Source: Dyslexia Scotland (2022) *Assessing, supporting and monitoring dyslexia* available at <https://addressingdyslexia.org/assessing-and-monitoring/>

The Graduated Approach

There is clear and consistent evidence that early identification of literacy difficulties, such as dyslexia, is key to providing effective interventions and preventing difficulties from becoming worse. The focus of any assessment should be on identification of needs and the best way to respond. The

SEND Code of Practice (2015) outlines the need for a graduated approach. This approach stands in contrast to a 'wait-to-fail' approach whereby assessment and identification of needs would traditionally have come following a period of not making progress and falling further behind peers. The graduated approach can be characterised by a four-stage cycle:

- **Assess Needs:** All schools should monitor and review the progress and development of all learners.
- **Plan:** Where a learner's progress gives cause for concern, staff should work in partnership with parents and carers to develop a plan to ensure that the learner receive the support they need for their future learning and development.
- **Do:** This graduated approach should be led and coordinated by the SENCO, working with teaching staff and parents/carers, to implement planned support.
- **Review:** The effectiveness of the support and the difference it has made to the learner's progress must be regularly reviewed.

Concern that a learner may have dyslexia should trigger further assessment. A good understanding of the nature of the learner's difficulties and strengths should inform classroom practice and any extra help the child requires. If they continue to fall behind the vast majority of their peers, consideration should be given to more specific assessment and support. This could include standardised tests targeting a specific area of need such spelling, reading or phonological awareness. **The Nottinghamshire Guide to Dyslexia Friendly Schools** contains more information.

While investigation and assessment should take place as early as possible, an assessment of dyslexia can be made with more confidence in Year 3. Young children with dyslexia may not be easily identified, particularly in the years before they start to learn to read. Though there may be indicators such as difficulties with phonological awareness, these may be signs of a range of developmental differences rather than dyslexia. Early assessment of children helps establish their strengths and weaknesses and appropriate support to be put in place. Teachers and teaching assistants in the early years should be alert to the identification of phonological skill weaknesses as these may be an indicator of later skill weaknesses. Teaching, extra support, implementation of structured programmes, observations, and assessment, need to be implemented over time in order to establish if the needs are persistent. Formal assessment is not appropriate at early ages.

A formal assessment of dyslexia can only be carried out by an accredited specialist teacher. A formal assessment should not be required before support is put in place and is not needed to identify a learner as being dyslexic. A formal assessment report from a specialist teacher is not required for access arrangements for exams. Support is based on the pupil's presenting needs and is not dependent on the pupil having any formal identification of dyslexia. The exception to this is the Disabled Students' Allowance application for Higher Education, where a copy of an assessment report assessment from a practitioner psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher is required. Many institutions will arrange this for students.

School-based assessment

Initial identification will be through ongoing assessment for learning.

Schools should gather a range of information, including:

- Information concerning the pupil's progress in word reading and spelling regarding age related National Curriculum expectations
- Assessment of vocabulary, phonic skills and phonological skills
- A comparison with pupils of the same age, e.g. standardised assessment related to word reading and spelling
- Background information and initial concerns from teachers, TAs and parents/carers
- Pupil views, including what they enjoy, interests, what help they feel they need
- Completed dyslexia friendly classroom audit/discussion
- School history (including attendance history)
- Family information (Family members with dyslexic background? EAL?)
- Child development background (Speech & language needs, medical/ developmental history including dates of last hearing & vision tests & results when significant)
- Pupil strengths
- Previous concerns and SEN support cycles
- Previous interventions with dates and impact data

There is no single test which will indicate dyslexia; rather there are a range of materials that can be used effectively by schools, and, for more severe and persistent difficulties, specialist practitioners. These may include commercially bought screeners and the materials provided by the **Nottinghamshire Guide to Dyslexia Friendly Schools**. No particular

pattern of test scores can be regarded as necessary or sufficient in deciding whether and to what extent learning difficulties can be described as dyslexia, thus a test of general ability is not necessary to determine whether a pupil does or does not have dyslexia. For more support on gathering information and building up pupil profiles, see the **Nottinghamshire Guide to Dyslexia Friendly Schools**.

The following three aspects need to be carefully evaluated through the assessment process:

- That the pupil is learning/has learnt accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling very incompletely
- That appropriate learning opportunities have been provided
- That progress has been made only as a result of much additional effort/instruction and that the difficulties have, nevertheless persisted.

Source: Working Party of the DECP (1999)

To be useful, all assessments should lead to workable plans of action that promote learning. An assessment of dyslexia can be used to help determine what is appropriate learning support at school. It will provide evidence of the child's strengths as well as areas of difficulty and can help teachers and parents/carers to understand what progress and achievement it is appropriate to expect for the individual child.

4. DYSLEXIA FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

A dyslexia friendly learning environment has the potential to improve the learning of all pupils. A dyslexia friendly learning environment acknowledges that all children learn in different ways and have different strengths. A dyslexia friendly learning environment will strive to enable all learners to reach their potential and access the wider curriculum, regardless of any difficulties associated with dyslexia.

Dyslexia friendly schools have an ethos that respects individual's differences, values the whole learner and celebrates their strengths. They have high expectations for all learners and promote resilience and a growth mindset. They promote good communication with parents/carers and pupils. This practice is underpinned by policy and is promoted by staff throughout school at all levels. For more information see **The Nottinghamshire Guide to Dyslexia Friendly Schools**.

The Education Endowment Foundation's 'Five a day' principles outline what high-quality teaching looks like for learners with SEND, including dyslexia. Below are some examples of dyslexia friendly provision, but they do not represent an exhaustive list.

Explicit instruction:

- Small steps, carefully sequenced
- Teacher modelling, guided practice followed by independent practice
- Anticipating and planning for misconceptions
- Using clear and unambiguous language and the explicit teaching of vocabulary

Cognitive techniques:

- Reducing cognitive load

- Activating prior learning
- Overlearning
- Repetition
- Multisensory teaching and dual coding

Metacognitive techniques:

- Planning skills – e.g., mind mapping
- Self-evaluation skills
- Pre-reading
- Study skills
- Reading comprehension techniques

Scaffolding:

- Writing frames
- Sentence starters
- Alternative methods to acquire and demonstrate learning other than reading and writing texts
- Reading rulers
- Spelling support – spell checkers, dictionary apps, spelling dictionaries

Flexible Grouping:

- Flexible groups based on current need or level of mastery
- Peer support
- Not streamed for all subjects based on literacy abilities

Using Technology:

- Alternative methods of recording – photographs, infographics
- Reading and writing programs such as Clicker
- Text to speech technology- e.g. scanning pens, Immersive reader

- Speech to text technology

Advice on inclusive technology is available from the Senior Teacher for IT in the Cognition and Learning team at SFSS.

5. INTERVENTION

The nature of dyslexia means that despite high quality, dyslexia friendly teaching, there will be a need for targeted teaching to address the aspects of literacy skills which are particularly weak. This intervention may take a range of forms but where they are evidence-based interventions, they must be implemented according to the way the programme was designed. Any time spent outside the classroom should benefit learners on their return. If interventions are being delivered by teaching assistants, teachers should work closely with them and maintain an overview to make effective connections between out of class activities and classroom learning.

Effective interventions should be:

- Structured
- Sequential
- Cumulative
- Multisensory
- Engaging
- Frequent – at least three times a week, and if possible, daily
- Monitored for impact, including a baseline, end of intervention data, engagement and attendance

Systematic synthetic phonics is widely agreed as most effective method for teaching early reading and writing, but supplementary approaches may also be effective for some learners. See **SFSS Notes Regarding the Reading Framework** for more details.

Useful sources for evaluating evidence-based literacy interventions can be found here:

www.evidence4impact.org.uk

<https://www.theschoolpsychologyservice.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/What-Works-for-Literacy-Difficulties-6th-Edition-2020.pdf>

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>

6. ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

Access arrangements are adjustments based on normal classroom practice for pupils with particular needs (for example significant special educational needs, disability or limited fluency in English) which allow them to access national curriculum tests. Access arrangements do not provide an unfair advantage.

A full list of the range of access arrangements available and the eligibility criteria that accompany them for all the statutory tests at primary school can be found on the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-phonics-screening-check-administration-guidance>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-1-tests-access-arrangements>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multiplication-tables-check-administration-guidance>

<https://www.gov.uk/key-stage-2-tests-how-to-use-access-arrangements>

For secondary schools they can be found at the website of the Joint Qualifications Council:

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/>

It is a school's responsibility to decide for which of its pupils it applies for access arrangements. In exceptional circumstances the school may decide to obtain the advice of the County Council Support Services in reaching this decision. It is also the school's responsibility to gather the necessary evidence to support any such request. **This should be organised at the beginning of Key Stage 4 for secondary schools.**

7. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: PARENTS/CARERS

Q: Do I need to get a specialist teacher or educational psychologist involved in order to have my child's dyslexia recognised?

A: No. Formal dyslexia assessments can only be completed by a specialist teacher with an appropriate qualification or an educational psychologist. However, with the right training and tools, staff in schools are able to identify literacy difficulties, including dyslexia and put support in place. They can use a range of screening tools, assessments and other relevant information to identify strengths and areas of weakness. Where schools feel they need further training to do this, or where pupils' needs are particularly complex or exceptional, advice may be sought from SFSS. A formal assessment of dyslexia is not needed to access any support in school, including access arrangements.

Q: Do the school have to accept the findings of a private dyslexia assessment?

A: School should read the report and it would be good practice to meet with you to discuss its findings. School should listen to your concerns and should share with you any support which is already in place, especially if it is different from the recommendations contained in the report. School should be able to explain why a particular type of support has been selected and give evidence of its impact. Remember that the report will provide a snapshot of a learner, whereas school will have information gathered over time. The best outcomes will be seen when school and home are able to work together.

Q: Does my child need an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)?

A: No. An EHC plan is a legal document which details the support a child or young person should receive in relation to their education and healthcare. This plan is written by your Local Authority and can be given to schools and other professionals to explain the support your child requires. An EHC plan is not necessary for your child's needs to be identified and supported in school.

My child has been identified as dyslexic. What support should they be receiving? Should it be delivered by a specialist dyslexia teacher?

Children with dyslexia will experience persistent difficulties with literacy and will require targeted provision to meet their needs.

They will need high quality teaching in a dyslexia friendly classroom. Often, they will need some form of intervention as well as a dyslexia friendly environment to learn in. The best interventions are evidence-based and should be carefully selected based on a detailed understanding of a learner's strengths and areas of weakness.

Interventions can be carried out by teachers or teaching assistants, providing they have the relevant training. Consideration should also be given to support a learner's self-esteem, and learners should be helped to understand their own areas of strength and difficulties so they can acquire self-help strategies too.

Q: What can I do if I'm unhappy with the support school is providing?

A: You should request a meeting with school, where you will be able to explain your concerns and hear school's views. Your school's complaints procedure will identify a relevant person to meet with.

Q: What support will my child get during exams?

A: During exams and assessments, arrangements can be made to support your child, depending on their needs and according to a set of criteria. This support might be a reader, a scribe or extra time. School will need to provide evidence of a learner's needs and show that the proposed support is part of their normal practice. The evidence does not need to be a formal dyslexia assessment.

Q: How can I support my child at home?

A: Understand that your child may be working significantly harder than their peers and they may be exhausted and frustrated at the end of a school day. Break homework into manageable chunks and allow your child time to relax at home. Foster their interests and celebrate their strengths. Praise their successes and help them stay organised. Maintain a positive, open dialogue with school in order to achieve the best outcomes

8. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: SCHOOLS

Q: What steps should we take if we suspect a learner is dyslexic?

A: Discuss your concerns with their parents/carers. Begin the process of gathering information about their barriers to learning and their strengths, following the guidance in this document. Make sure that there is dyslexia friendly provision in the classroom and that appropriate evidence-based intervention is in place if necessary. Consider supporting self-esteem and also teach metacognitive strategies that will help the pupil to develop confidence and independence.

Q: What should I say to a parent/carer who has an independent assessment which concludes their child is dyslexic?

A: You should read the report and invite parents/carers into school to discuss it. The report may contain information which is new to you and may contribute to your overall understanding of a learner's strengths and areas of weakness. If the report makes recommendations about support and interventions, you should discuss these with parents/carers. You should explain what you are already doing to support their child and if you do not agree with the recommendations, you should explain your reasoning and provide evidence. You may need to discuss which interventions are manageable within the given resources. You should be able to demonstrate that you are aware of their child's needs and that appropriate support is available.

Q: Do I need a specific qualification to identify dyslexia?

A: No. Using the information gathering process described in this guidance, and a clear definition of your understanding of dyslexia, you will have the skills needed to identify dyslexic learners. You should be clear that this is not a formal identification. You may decide to use the term “dyslexic traits” or “tendencies” to communicate this to parents/carers. You should be able to demonstrate to parents/carers that a formal identification of dyslexia is not necessary in order for you to meet their child’s needs.

Q: Should all learners with dyslexia be on SEN Support?

A: Not necessarily, this will depend on their level of need. However, you should keep a record of who has been identified as having dyslexic traits. It would be good practice to keep a separate register, including learners’ provision, so you can track progress and to support transition between classes and schools.