



Supporting Pupils with Literacy Difficulties in the Classroom

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Introduction

Children who struggle to learn to read, write and spell in comparison to the rate of the majority of their peers require interventions that fall broadly into two categories;

The removal of barriers:

- Within the child – literacy skills (teaching the basic skills required to develop their literacy and learning skills)
- Within the classroom – access to the curriculum (ensuring fair and equal access to the curriculum at the level of their understanding)

“Children are wired for sound, but print is an optional accessory that must be painstakingly bolted on”

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/Dyslexiapack300609final_tcm4-554168_tcm4-619474.pdfpack

Class teachers have a key role and responsibility in both these areas. In working together, SfL and Class teachers can ensure that effective approaches are identified and followed through across contexts and across the curriculum and that, where appropriate, specific interventions can take place daily. This paper gives an overview of areas to be considered in the classroom and offers a flavour of the strategies that can be used – often to the benefit of all pupils in the class.

Use of the document follows on from identification and assessment. It is written to complement the Moray’s ASN Support Manual. <http://www.supportmanual.co.uk/> (**Username: asnmoray / Password: qs9NUA5a**) and the Addressing Dyslexia toolkit <http://www.addressingdyslexia.org/>. Specific approaches will differ in practice for age and stage of literacy development; however the underlying principles will remain constant.

GENERAL

Early identification of difficulties acquiring literacy skills should take place and result in additional focussed input by February in P1.

Reading difficulties do not spontaneously recover and will only get worse if left.

The evidence suggests that intervention to improve word attack skills and fluency also improve **comprehension** too.

www.interventionsforliteracy.org.uk provides a comprehensive overview of positively **evaluated** systematic approaches to addressing reading, writing, spelling and comprehension difficulties.

Have high **expectations** for thinking skills and realistic expectations of literacy skills

Whether for reading, writing and/or spelling, an appropriate and evidence based, structured and systematic approach should be identified and adhered to. The effectiveness of any programme relies on 'little and often' approach. Interventions for reading and spelling will often have a phonological basis and many are a version of precision teaching <http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file88660.pdf>.

Class teachers should work jointly with SfL colleagues to bring specific interventions and strategies into the classroom. Joint planning requires ring fenced liaison time between the class teacher, SfL and support staff.

Pupils with literacy difficulties will require **extra time** for tasks that involve aspects of literacy that they find difficult and require additional effort.

Some literacy difficulties may be as a result of **disrupted learning** and a short intensive period of input may provide the boost that is needed to get back on track.

The young person's **progress** should be monitored in order to inform next steps and ensure intervention is having a positive impact.

<p>READING</p> <p>The introduction of a specific and positively evaluated literacy programme can be important, particularly when the pupil requires additional input to reinforce the class approach to early reading (e.g. Jolly Phonics). This should be followed through in school, not left as an additional homework task.</p>	<p>Make explicit the links between the same words or sounds across the curriculum.</p>
	<p>Avoid asking the pupil to read out loud in front of the wider group.</p>
	<p>Pre record reading books to help familiarise the pupil with the story and increase their confidence when tackling it.</p>
	<p>Paired Reading has positive outcomes for both tutee and peer tutor. It can be used for different ages and stages and has evidence based impact on both reading fluency and comprehension. http://www.dundee.ac.uk/eswce/research/projects/trwresources/reading/ http://www.moray.gov.uk/moray_standard/page_62204.html</p>
	<p>Choose high interest readers for the older pupils where the stories are age appropriate and the reading demands modified. Examples of these include Barrington Stokes and Rapid books.</p>
	<p>Have a pre-agreed signal for help when a word or passage is too tricky.</p>
	<p>Establish an ethos of peer support within the classroom.</p>
	<p>Emphasise different strengths and ensure that pupils understand that reading skills are not a measure of general intelligence.</p>
	<p>To support reading for information, teach the pupil to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scan for the gist - Read any questions (and ideally discuss), - Re-read the passage carefully and use a highlighter for what they think are the key points.
	<p>Read through any written feedback provided on work to ensure the pupil is aware of the comments made.</p>
	<p>Coloured overlays can help a range of pupils in 'seeing' text. Have a range available so that pupils can use if they think it makes a difference. Background colours can also be changed when using ICT.</p>
	<p>Some pupils respond to line trackers or book marks to help them keep their place.</p>
	<p>Encourage an enjoyment of reading and opportunities to extend vocabulary and comprehension by providing access to stories in alternative formats. See www.calibre.org for free access to digital audio books.</p>

SPELLING It is important that new spelling is taught in a systematic manner and organised into word 'families'.	Irregular spellings are likely to need memory aids (e.g. mnemonics, pictures) to help them stick.
	Tackle spelling patterns using methods such as Simultaneous Oral Spelling. Encourage the pupil to say the word, spell it out loud while looking at it, cover and spell it out loud a few more times before writing it down.
	Cued spelling incorporates use of memory aides and aspects of precision teaching and involves an adult helper and short daily exercises. http://www.dundee.ac.uk/eswce/research/projects/trwresources/spelling/
	Create individual word cards for reference words or sound patterns that the pupil struggles with. A picture, drawn by the pupil, could be added for reference.
	By P7 and into secondary, focus on establishing the 100 to 200 most common words .

WRITING In general terms, teach strategies for organising thoughts prior to writing. Develop skills in identifying own errors.	Discuss the pupil's writing task and content prior to them attempting to structure the response.
	Provide structure for writing tasks. Writing frames can help. See the following for examples. http://homepages.warwick.ac.uk/staff/D.J.Wray/Ideas/frames.html
	Consider the use of writing programmes such as 'Write Away Together' or 'Paired Writing'. Support staff can be trained to work with pupils.
	Explicitly teach editing and proofing skills, including use of spell checker etc.
	Be aware that pupils may limit themselves to writing the words they think they can spell and hence their content is less sophisticated than it would be if they presented orally. Encourage 'having a go' in their writing to elicit a wider range of vocabulary.

<p>HANDWRITING</p> <p>Where needed, this should continue to be taught in short, regular sessions. Alternative forms of recording should also be introduced to access the curriculum including the development of ICT skills.</p>	<p>Difficulty with letter formation requires short regular practise where formation is explicitly taught. This can use a variety of materials including mini white boards, chalk etc.</p>
	<p>Consider use of writing aids such as pencil grips or slanted writing boards.</p>
	<p>Additional time for writing tasks and modification of written expectations.</p>
	<p>Avoid extended copying from a class board (extended will mean different amounts for different pupils). For some pupils with tracking difficulties, any amount of copying from the board will be difficult.</p>
	<p>Teach keyboard and word processing skills by P5, if not sooner. This may take time away from other curricular tasks, but will save time and increase curricular access in the future.</p>
	<p>Encourage cursive writing while accepting extended written efforts whatever the format, recognising effort expended. It is important that pupils can focus on getting the main ideas on paper without worrying about spelling or handwriting.</p>
	<p>Encourage self-talk or thinking out loud while writing, whether in letter formation (at early stages) or content later on.</p>

<p>LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Pupils with literacy difficulties can be disadvantaged in terms of language for two reasons. Early speech difficulties are often linked with difficulties acquiring literacy skills. In addition, poor acquisition of literacy has a knock on effect on pupils' vocabulary and wider knowledge and understanding as they will read less and at a lower level. The effects of the reduced reading can be accumulative.</p>	<p>Find alternative ways of accessing literature (e.g. audio books; on-line resources).</p>
	<p>Do not assume knowledge of vocabulary and explicitly teach new/topic based words/concepts. Do not fall into the trap of thinking pupils 'should' know what a word means.</p>
	<p>Where a pupil's difficulties are specific in nature, have them learn new spellings at the level of their spelling and make sure they can explore more complex vocabulary verbally. This might mean belonging to two spelling groups, one for spellings, the other for meanings.</p>

<p>ACCESS TO THE CURRICULUM</p> <p>Always differentiate between the young person's literacy skills and the level at which they can engage in learning. How large this gap is will depend upon the individual, however, it is important to keep expectations around thinking and doing high.</p>	<p>Differentiate reading and writing expectations without 'dumbing down' content and concepts. This may require recording or someone else being a reader.</p>
	<p>Make links with cognitive learning and that engaging in activities that are effortful 'grow' our brains. Teach the 'how' of learning as well as the 'what'.</p>
	<p>Use a range of teaching approaches including critical skills, reciprocal teaching approaches, group tasks etc.</p>
	<p>Teach study skills from an early age including the use of mind maps.</p>
	<p>Be clear about the purpose of assessments. If they are to provide information regarding the pupil's skills, knowledge or creativity, care should be taken that literacy demands do not hinder their performance both in how the assessment is presented and how their responses are recorded.</p>

<p>HOMEWORK</p> <p>It is more than likely that the pupil has had a day filled with challenges beyond that of most of their peers and as a result this has been more effortful and tiring. The pupil should not be given 'extra' homework to catch up.</p>	<p>Communicate regularly with parents in order to gauge how the pupil is coping with homework; if they are not coping, strategies should be agreed.</p>
	<p>Bear in mind the purpose of the task. The form it takes may need modifying in both input and output, (e.g. instead of writing sentences for spelling homework, learn the word and tell an adult a sentence which demonstrates comprehension. Adults can then record these sentences or verify the task has been done.</p>
	<p>Make best use of available ICT. Provision of a pen drive can prevent work having to be printed at home.</p>

THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT	Consider seating . Sit the pupil near to where the teacher tends to sit in order to allow easy access to support and for progress to be monitored. Sit them near to and facing the board and place supportive peers around.
	Sit the pupil in clear view of flow diagrams and key words to support routines and activities such as extended writing.
	Clearly label common words around the classroom.

SUPPORTING MEMORY Many youngsters with literacy difficulties find it hard to immediately recall instructions (short term memory), hold small pieces of information in their minds while they work with them (working memory) or retain information in the longer term (transfer to long term memory). This has a detrimental effect on their wider learning. See www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file77540.pdf for an overview of memory difficulties and supportive strategies.	Keep instructions short and simple.
	Avoid placing too many demands on short term or working memory by using extended verbal instructions . Once something is said, it is gone; so 'park' them visually (e.g. by using key words/pictures or written step by step instructions).
	Activities such as mental maths can be particularly stressful. In order to enable pupils to have the mental space to do the thinking (free up space on their ' mental jotter '), allow them access to pencil and paper or small whiteboards to use for recording the sum/problem and do their working out. It is more important that they can understand and do the task.
	Prioritise what you expect the pupil to learn by rote, (e.g. focussing on 2, 5 and 10 times tables may be realistic).
	Provide supports such as number lines, table squares and access to a calculator.
	Help the young person establish meaning and link to other learning experiences to promote longer term retention. Again, tricks such as mnemonics or pictures can help establish a 'hook' where otherwise there is little. Rehearsal/repetition can also help and some have found linking to music/songs effective.
	Ensure you refer back to the pupil's learning intentions throughout the lesson.

ORGANISATION

A range of pupils can experience organisational difficulties and it is more common in individuals with literacy difficulties. See www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file82271.pdf which relates to Developmental Coordination Disorder, which a youngster may or may not be affected by. This offers a comprehensive list of strategies to support pupils with organisational difficulties.

Have a well **organised classroom** and ensure resources are clearly **labelled**.

Establish **routines** for all the class and provide cues for those who struggle to become automatic with them.

When copying from the **board**, start each line with a differently coloured dot to help pupils find their place when looking up again.

Give clear, short **instructions**. Provide visual supports such as demonstration/pictures/tick lists.

Have left and right, days of the week and months of the year clearly **displayed**. Explicitly teach tricks to remember left and right, which side of the page to start on, mnemonics for months of the year etc.

Create individualised '**work mats**' – laminated A3 paper with number line, table square, left and right and common words clearly visible.

Ensure **predictability** throughout the day, and offer a countdown to prepare pupils for a change in activity (e.g. in 5 minutes, we're going to...). A whole class visual timetable will help the majority of pupils in the class. Go over this at the beginning of the day and refer back to it, modelling the use of visual supports.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

The impact of literacy difficulties on a young person's view of their own competence and ability cannot be underestimated. It is important that they have an age appropriate **understanding** of the nature of their strengths and difficulties and that they know that literacy is not a measure of 'ability'. It is also important that they have an **awareness** of the strategies that help them to be successful.

The biggest problem with dyslexic kids is not the perceptual problem, it is their perception of themselves. That was my biggest problem. " - Bruce Jenner

It is not possible to improve someone's **self esteem** by telling them how worthy they are in your opinion. It requires real experience of progress and competency, and specific, evidence based feedback. The young person should be supported in developing their own strategies. It is also important to develop their ability to explain their difficulties.

As a starting point, interpret challenging behaviours as potential avoidance or deflection strategies. **Avoid shaming** language such as 'why did you do that?' and replace with a query about what is happening and how you can help.

Establish **mixed ability** seating, either as default seating or allow seating to be fluid throughout the day. Don't keep pupils in their reading or maths groups at other times.

Promote an understanding of neuroplasticity and growth mindsets in order to help young people understand that effort makes a difference and we can learn new skills. See www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file84741.pdf

Avoid focusing on 'final' and 'good' pieces of work. Celebrate the **process** and point out the successful changes. This means displaying work at its various stages. The emphasis is not on the end product but on the **learning** that has taken place.