

## Important points to remember when speaking to parents about reading difficulties and dyslexia

These points should assist you in having conversations with parents regarding concerns around reading difficulties and dyslexia. The aim is to help parents to understand the graduated process implemented by schools and reassure them that a private assessment or diagnosis is not required to initiate and put these arrangements in place.

- In most cases it is not vital to have a diagnosis of a specific learning or reading difficulty.
- It is more important to identify what the specific difficulties a pupil may be facing and what the arrangements are to support these.
- Literacy Difficulties are described in different ways. The terms Dyslexia and Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) are often used interchangeably and usually after assessment through intervention over time.
- Dyslexia is derived from two Greek words, 'dys' meaning 'difficulty' and 'lexicos' meaning 'words'. The literal meaning is therefore 'difficulty with words', or difficulty reading and spelling words.
- 'Dyslexia' has now become a term used to describe a wide range of difficulties within literacy. The overuse of this term may be problematic as a means of describing what the problem actually is when speaking to parents. To focus on the term being more helpful, it was replaced by the phrase 'specific learning/literacy difficulties or SpLD. This is helpful in conversations when it is used with statements such as 'pupil A has a specific learning difficulty with reading and/or spelling'.
- This however does not eliminate the use of the term especially for parents or professionals that may feel the "need" for the term to be used in offering an explanation. This in turn may lead to conversations with parents and teachers where they are asking "so does this mean they have dyslexia then?" SENCOs may share with parents that this diagnosis would require specific assessments and in many cases the interventions and strategies adopted would remain the same with or without the diagnosis.
- It is important to remind parents that the terminology or label is not as important as the action taken. It is vital that if a pupil has any difficulties in learning to read and write, steps are taken to clarify the problem and identify appropriate teaching strategies. This is best addressed through looking at the specific difficulties the pupil may be experiencing, and parents' views and insights should be taken into account as part of this process.
- Working together with parents it is important to help them realise that the aim is not to make the need to label children as 'dyslexic' obsolete but for it to be used as a stepping stone of enquiry as to what the child's literacy difficulties are, possibly negating the need for a formal diagnosis at a later stage. This approach then does not force a decision to label but can be used as a programme of intervention.
- Schools may gather evidence through the use of a J-Lait tool as well as other assessment tools such as LASS, COPS, BPVS to identify needs and recommend possible interventions. This may include specific targets and/or programmes, small group instructions, precision teaching or specific recommended resources. The interventions may be targeted to specific skills with the intention of improving interactions with books and other reading resources, developing confidence and increasing comprehension, spelling and writing skills.
- In secondary school special access arrangements for GCSE examinations are based on literacy levels, along with the history of need and provision (such as extra time, use of ICT or a scribe). SENCOs will need to liaise with class teachers and a specialist assessment would generally take place at the beginning of the course, usually during Year 9. SENCOs would follow guidelines and submission deadlines for exam access using information from the Joint Council for Qualifications. <https://www.jcq.org.uk>. A specific 'label' for access arrangements is not required in secondary school and these are determined by evidence of a pupil's "normal way of working". Identification of dyslexia is only necessary for special arrangements at university level.