



Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy

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Introduction

Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy has been developed by a working party of psychologists from the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and teachers from the Special Educational Needs and Disability Inclusion Service (SENDIS) over a period of two years. The process has included liaison with the Advisers for English and for Special Educational Needs, consultation with special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and head teachers and meeting local parents, including Milton Keynes Dyslexia Association. Members of the working party have also discussed the policy with the officers and members of the LEA and with colleagues in the Health Service.

Developing the policy has posed considerable challenges. Dyslexia has a long history and has attracted media attention over the years. 'Experts' cited in the media have claimed as many as one in five children have dyslexia. The use of the word **dyslexia** has aroused heated debate about 'diagnosis', the dangers of labelling children and the need for specialist support. Parents and teachers have been confused by the conflicting messages and this has generated considerable anxiety.

Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy clarifies the current use of the term dyslexia and the implications for assessment and support at a school level. The policy has been compiled following a review of the research evidence into the nature of dyslexia and effective practice in identification and support. This reflects the conclusions of the report of the Working Party of the British Psychological Society (1999) '**Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment**'.

Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy draws on the recent guidance from the Department for Education and Skills Research Report by Greg Brooks (2002) '**What Works for Children with Literacy Difficulties**' which evaluates the effectiveness of interventions in schools. The working party has also considered other evidence on the effectiveness of specific programmes and classroom support.

Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy forms part of the guidance from the LEA to assist schools in meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and in implementing the SEN Code of Practice (DfES 2001). It should be read in conjunction with the SEN Toolkit (DfES 2001) and Milton Keynes Special Education Handbook (available in schools).

Milton Keynes LEA supports the view that SEN is a mainstream issue. Good practice for pupils with dyslexia will promote their full and independent inclusion in mainstream classes. Effective provision for pupils with dyslexia requires a whole school approach, reflected in policies, classroom practice and support available to individual pupils. The LEA plans to assist schools in providing effective support through a rolling programme of workshops and training from the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), SENDIS and SEN Adviser. This will complement other training in implementing the National Literacy Strategy provided by the LEA.

Guidance for parents in supporting their child with literacy difficulties (including dyslexia) is also provided by the working party and is due for publication in October 2003.

Definition

We use the following definition of dyslexia:

Dyslexia is evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the 'word level' and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. It provides the basis of a staged process of assessment through teaching.

(British Psychological Society, 1999)

In terms of the National Literacy Strategy, dyslexia can be defined as severe and persistent difficulties with 'word level' work.

Why we are using this definition

1. It is important to be absolutely clear about the definition to establish a shared understanding and clarity for professionals and parents.
2. In the past there has been much debate in education about using the term **dyslexia** due to the many concerns about labelling children. We recognise that children are individuals and that there are dangers in using the label as an explanation for continuing failure. We use the term with the understanding that each child is different and it should not be an excuse for lack of progress.
3. We follow current research evidence, which suggests that dyslexia can occur in children of all abilities. Our definition does not rely on identifying a 'discrepancy' between a child's ability in one area and attainments in other areas. However, recognising and utilising children's strengths is important in order to increase their success and engagement with learning.
4. Dyslexia may co-exist with other barriers to learning. The existence of other difficulties should not preclude assessment for dyslexia or vice versa. We recognise the particular links there can be between dyslexia and the development of emotional and behavioural difficulties in some children. We see overcoming the barriers to achievement presented by dyslexia as essential in securing children's social and emotional adjustment as well as in increasing their attainments.

The link between dyslexia and other difficulties is not simple. Some children with literacy difficulties have low self-esteem, others may have poor co-ordination, language difficulties or other learning problems. A number of children with attention and motivational problems have significant difficulties in literacy. The link is not necessarily causal but needs to be considered in planning interventions. As these problems occur in some but not all children with dyslexia they are not part of the definition.

5. Our definition focuses on observed difficulties rather than underlying causes, reflecting the continuing debate in the field of dyslexia and the absence of an agreement of a single unitary causal explanation. We believe this should not restrict or impede pupil's access to constructive help.
6. Research evidence does not suggest a particular profile of cognitive abilities necessary to define dyslexia. However, we acknowledge the evidence suggesting the central role of phonological processing in successful reading and spelling.

What the research shows about word reading and spelling

1. Reading and spelling are complex skills that do not develop 'naturally'. They need to be taught.
2. Almost all children can learn to read and spell.
3. Children have an equal entitlement to effective literacy support, tailored to their needs.
4. If a child does not make progress, then teaching needs to be modified.
5. Parents play a vital role in helping their child to learn to read and spell.

Assessment and identification

Our definition of dyslexia requires that three aspects should be evaluated through assessment:

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

The role of schools and support services in assessment

1. In view of the number of children who are affected by dyslexia, we believe that the skills necessary to identify children with dyslexia should be available within schools. 'Diagnosis' by specialists who do not have access to information about the learning context and progress over time can only give partial information.

2. Teachers can identify dyslexia through their delivery of the National Literacy Strategy. They can use relevant information, for example from National Curriculum Assessments of reading and writing. Staff in Milton Keynes schools have received training in the teaching of reading and spelling, both in assessment and adjusting teaching to meet children's needs. However, it is perceived that many schools see dyslexia as something separate and different from this context. The LEA acknowledges that many teachers do not feel confident in identifying dyslexia and further training is required.
3. Educational psychologists and specialist teachers can support schools in training and in advising on support for individual pupils. They can work with the school staff (not necessarily directly with the child) to achieve a better understanding of the factors that may be helping or hindering progress, and to identify ways forward.
4. It is important to establish that appropriate learning opportunities are available. Staff need to consider and adjust features of the physical and emotional learning context, such as feedback to pupils, teaching materials, classroom expectations and motivational strategies. Further advice in modifying the curriculum and environment can be sought from the support services.
5. Assessment and support for pupils with dyslexia should be in line with the guidance with the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs and Milton Keynes Special Education Handbook.

Meeting the needs of children with dyslexia

1. The definition of dyslexia indicates that word reading and or spelling has been learnt incompletely after targeted support. We consider that for practical purposes a child would normally be at School Action for further investigation to be warranted (see Milton Keynes criteria in Special Education Handbook). Those children considered to have dyslexia would normally be expected to have accessed additional support in school and have levels of attainment that are significantly low.
2. The identification of dyslexia remains a separate issue from that of LEA funding - no label brings automatic additional resources, including dyslexia. It is the severity of need following intervention at School Action and School Action Plus that determines whether or not the LEA provides additional support.
3. The LEA provides services to assist schools in supporting children with special educational needs, including dyslexia. SENDIS can support schools to develop interventions and advise on suitable resources. The Educational Psychology Service can support schools in meeting the needs of children with more complex difficulties.
4. Milton Keynes LEA will support schools in identifying and supporting children with dyslexia at three levels:
 - Promoting good practice in establishing **dyslexia** friendly schools including whole school policy development and classroom approaches. There will be recognition for schools that demonstrate 'best practice'.
 - Developing specialist skills in identification and intervention for use with individuals and groups. Training will be available in specific intervention programmes.
 - Providing further professional development for teachers at a specialist level in supporting pupils with dyslexia, including recognised qualifications (currently OCR Course for Teachers of Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties provided by University College, Northampton).

Frequently asked questions

1. *Is any child who has reading difficulties dyslexic?*

There are all sorts of reasons why children may be behind with reading. Some children miss out on a lot of learning opportunities. For example, they may miss a lot of school and reading instruction. Once these children receive the reading instruction they need they will begin to make good progress. Their problems will not persist. Children with dyslexia also make progress but it is slow and takes a lot of effort. Their difficulties are persistent.

2. *What are the most effective approaches for pupils with dyslexia?*

At present we can say that it is important to have a targeted and systematic approach and to have lots of experience and practice in reading. We also know that work on sounds in words, phonic strategies and the application of these in reading text are all important. The National Literacy Strategy has helped with these aspects.

There is some evidence that several short teaching sessions are more effective than one long one and that breaking reading and spelling objectives down into smaller steps is valuable. Multi-sensory teaching is often recommended.

Schools are able to seek the advice of the English Adviser and Literacy Consultants on the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy and from the support services, including the SENDIS and the Educational Psychology Service in supporting children with difficulties.

3. *Does dyslexia run in families? Is there a gene for dyslexia?*

Some research has implicated a genetic link and recent studies have focussed on identifying particular genes. Problems with literacy do appear to run in families although separating genes from environment is notoriously difficult.

At present it is not possible to 'test' for dyslexia or identify literacy difficulties from gene analysis. We have seen that reading and spelling are culturally evolved skills invented by humans primarily to record spoken language and involve the successful integration of a number of different skills. Thus any genetic link is likely to be indirect and complex.

Research into this area will continue to be interesting. However, placing dyslexia in an educational context puts the focus on the teaching and wider educational environment. Certainly it is here that there is the greatest potential for positive change whatever the child's genes.

4. *How do parents get their child's dyslexia acknowledged?*

The best place to start is in school. School staff will have the most important information and will be those involved in working to help with identified difficulties. If parents have any worries about their child's literacy development, they should talk to the class teacher and clarify how the school's policy works for the identification and provision for children with literacy difficulties. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and Headteacher will have an overview and be involved with outside agencies.

Using the above definition, a 'one off' assessment by someone who does not have access to information about the teaching and support that has been provided, and the child's response to this, is not likely to identify dyslexia. An assessment of this kind cannot provide the full picture and would need to be seen as part of the broader assessment of the child's learning.

5. *Does a child have to have at least average intelligence to have dyslexia?*

Intelligence and dyslexia are separate. Some children who have very low intelligence are good at reading words, just as some children who have high intelligence have problems with reading. In the past the popular notion of dyslexia was of highly intelligent children who had reading problems. Their difficulties stood out and were easily spotted. These days we understand that dyslexia can occur at all levels of intelligence, and in all social classes and ethnic groups. Many children whose problems were missed or overlooked in the past can now have their difficulties recognised and be provided with help and support.

6. *Does it need an Educational Psychologist to get dyslexia recognised?*

Not necessarily. Many teachers are now trained in recognising these problems and the National Literacy Strategy has assisted in highlighting difficulties at an early stage. The Code of Practice encourages a staged approach to assessment through teaching and this can be done through good practice in schools alongside special educational needs support where needed. The emphasis is on ensuring that children's needs are identified and addressed as soon as possible.

7. *Should identification of dyslexia trigger specialist teaching?*

The definition provides the basis for support at different levels. At the early stages when the child is not making progress changes may involve some minor adjustments to the teaching provided for the whole class. It may become necessary for some pupils to have the teaching already in place broken down into smaller steps at a slower pace and with more repetition, supported by a teaching assistant under the class teacher's guidance. If progress remains unsatisfactory, the child should be offered more intensive support and extra help would become increasingly 'specialist' as it is adjusted to reflect the child's response to it.

Research about effective interventions should inform practice and will continue to be important, such as the DfES guidance (Brookes, 2002).

Intervention and Support

Support for pupils with dyslexia should be consistent with the curriculum. Since 1997 when the Literacy Strategy was introduced in schools, there has been a framework for teaching and learning.

Effective literacy provision at primary level has been described in terms of three 'waves' of intervention (DfES 2003) .

- **Wave 1**

The effective inclusion of all children in a daily and high quality literacy hour

- **Wave 2**

Additional small-group intervention for children who can be expected to catch up with their peers as a result of the intervention

- **Wave 3**

Specific targeted approaches for children identified as requiring SEN support (on School Action, School Action Plus or with a Statement of special educational needs)

1. Wave 1 support

Wave 1 whole class support is the entitlement of every pupil in our schools. This includes the delivery of a 'quality literacy hour' with effective planning and management. To maximise the effectiveness, schools need to be 'dyslexia friendly' creating a positive literacy environment.

At this level teachers carry out regular assessments of progress in literacy through the curriculum, including National Curriculum Assessments. Some schools use additional screening measures to identify pupils with learning difficulties.

It is expected that there will be 'in class' support from a teaching assistant for some literacy activities on a regular basis. Schools will also enlist the support of parents through setting homework. (This should be specified in homework guidance for parents.)

2. Wave 2 support

For some children who are 'at risk' of underachievement, the DfES has provided a range of structured small group interventions, designed to boost achievement in literacy. These include ELS in year 1, ALS in year 3 and FLS in year 5. Booster classes and summer schools (for pupils in Year 7) have also been provided to maximise progress in key year groups.

Children identified for Wave 2 support do not generally have special educational needs although their attainments in reading and writing are below average. It is expected that with support many of these pupils will 'catch up' with their peers.

3. Wave 3 support

The DfES guidance on Wave 3 support includes a list of interventions which are backed by research evidence (DfES 2003).

- **School Action**

Children with more significant difficulties as assessed by the Foundation Profile in Year R, P levels and National Curriculum levels may meet the criteria for support at School Action. Teaching staff would carry out more detailed diagnostic assessment and set up an IEP or GEP. Advice could be sought from SENDIS. Support at this level would include additional differentiated learning experiences, including specific interventions. ICT and other specialised resources might be used to support children at School Action.

Teachers would be expected to provide differentiated homework and to enlist the support of parents in reinforcing IEP activities. Support for literacy within the classroom and some structured small group work would be provided on a regular basis.

- **School Action Plus**

Pupils who meet the thresholds for School Action Plus would require more in depth assessment in the areas of reading and spelling, including careful analysis of errors and learning styles. The advice from external support services should be sought in assessing and monitoring progress through the child's IEP. For a small number of pupils an ICT assessment might be appropriate.

Children at School Action Plus would regularly receive support both in a small group and/or individually. Structured programmes selected on the basis of evidence of effectiveness would be followed. Additional support would be provided at home and guidance given to parents.

- **Pupils with Statements of SEN**

Children with statements of special educational needs would have already had a detailed assessment of areas of need and appropriate provision would be specified. This would include additional support from a teaching assistant and advice/support from a specialist teacher, in addition to normal provision at School Action Plus. Specific resources might be listed on the statement.

The progress of pupils with a statement will be closely monitored by the SENCo and the Annual Review will determine objectives for the next 12 months.

- **Examinations**

Pupils with dyslexia undertaking GCSE examinations may need assessment for a report for the examination board in order that appropriate arrangements may be provided. This needs to be provided by a specialist teacher or educational psychologist. Guidance is available for secondary schools.

Pupils do not require a statement of SEN to receive examinations concessions.

References

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