

A photograph of two hands raised against a teal background. The hand on the left is open with fingers spread, while the hand on the right is closed in a fist. The skin is a light, natural tone. The background is a solid, vibrant teal color.

**Education for learners with  
dyslexia**

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## FOREWORD

I am on record as saying that the most effective schools are those which value each child as an individual. Meeting the needs of every learner is the key purpose of any educational organisation, whether it is an early years centre, a school, a service providing outreach provision for pupils in a range of settings or a strategic service such as an education authority. The approaches taken to support learning in effective classrooms are also the approaches needed to support children with dyslexia.

In our *Count Us In* report, HMIE explored the overarching ideas involved in inclusive education. We carried that thinking forward when we developed *The Journey to Excellence* and embedded it in the quality indicators in the third edition of *How good is our school?*. Recently, and in the context of inclusion, we have examined a series of challenges facing Scottish Education, including autism spectrum disorders, dealing with young people in danger of missing out on chances and choices in education, deaf children and anti-sectarianism. This report tackles a similarly difficult challenge facing Scottish education – providing the best help we can to young people with dyslexia.

A worldwide debate continues around what we describe as ‘dyslexia’ – its original meaning is ‘difficulty with words’ – and which encompasses learning difficulties related to literacy and language skills. The debate revolves around, among other aspects, an agreed definition of dyslexia. In most practice in Scotland a medical model, where there is a diagnosis and a prognosis that assumes young people with dyslexia need different strategies from other learners in relation to literacy and language acquisition, has been replaced by a wider perspective. Dyslexia is now seen widely as part of a

continuum of needs that relate to approaches to developing language and literacy skills. It does not always come unaccompanied. Learners often face a range of other challenges to various degrees of severity. A further perspective comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>1</sup> which suggests that dyslexia does not exist to the same extent in every culture, language and education system.

As with a range of other additional learning needs, the key is to assess accurately the communication difficulties being experienced and to find what works for each learner. In the case of dyslexia, this involves a deep understanding of how young people learn to read and the skilled interactive teaching of phonics and language development and processing skills. In turn this has implications for staff development, ‘recovery’ programmes for learners and a clarification of the set of skills required to attain fluency in reading. To that extent, Curriculum for Excellence provides the opportunity to develop a new emphasis on the acquisition of literacy skills, in a thinking and problem solving approach to inclusion and success for all. Such an approach strengthens the role of teachers’ knowledge and professional development to ensure better outcomes for all learners.

It is not the purpose of this report to settle a long running and global debate, but rather to take a pragmatic look at the services provided by education authorities and schools for learners with literacy and language skills difficulties. In the report, we use the term ‘dyslexia’ throughout to convey difficulties which affect literacy and language related skills that some authorities overtly call ‘dyslexia’ and others deal with through a wide approach to meeting pupils’ learning needs and staged interventions.

<sup>1</sup> *Understanding the Brain: The Birth of a Learning Science* (P91), OECD, 2007.

The report has surveyed the views of children, parents, schools and authorities. A mixed picture has emerged in which, sometimes due to the stance being taken and the varied level of skills in schools and authorities, not all young people were having their learning needs addressed sufficiently rigorously and some authorities were not able to take an evidence-based and well-informed strategic overview. At the same time we have some outstanding practice on which to build. It is now for the profession to ensure that language skills and literacy acquisition are optimised for everyone. Our aim is to maximise the potential of every learner and to meet the learning needs of every young person.

As part of this task, HMIE has identified good practice and made recommendations for moving forward. I commend this report to you as an important contribution to our understanding of dyslexia and the extent to which the needs of pupils with literacy and language skills difficulties are currently being met.

## 1. BACKGROUND

Over the period 2007-2008, HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) undertook a broad evaluation of provision for children, young people and adults with dyslexia in Scotland. The investigation identified the range and quality of provision in Scotland across all sectors. Inspectors visited a number of pre-school centres, primary, secondary, independent and special schools, Scotland's colleges and faculties of education in Scottish universities. In addition, the work of HMIE was informed by a literature review of current approaches to the provision of education for children with dyslexia<sup>2</sup> and other recent research carried out by Scottish Government, universities, education authorities and voluntary agencies. HMIE also drew on a survey of provision in Scottish local authorities and the views of voluntary agencies, teachers, parents, children and young people. The scope of this task was informed by a national advisory group which included parents, teachers, members of the voluntary sector, educational psychologists, and Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), local authority, college and university representatives.

In recent years, a recurrent theme in the media has been concern expressed by learners and their families about the readiness of schools and local authorities to respond to and meet the needs of children, young people and adults with dyslexia. Diverse views have been presented about what exactly dyslexia is, its origin, methods of identifying and assessing it and appropriate interventions.

Significantly, the majority of local authorities used the British Psychological Society's view 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 for a staged process of assessment through teaching.<sup>3</sup>

This view recognises that children with dyslexia can demonstrate marked differences in terms of their competence in different areas, particularly in regard to oral versus text-based skills. Many authorities adopted this view because they thought it did not rely on a particular profile of cognitive skills and was broadly inclusive. Another key feature of this view is its focus on persistent problems in learning to read, write and spell, on a continuum from very mild to severe, the level of intervention depending on the degree to which learning is impaired. This view also articulated well with authorities' staged intervention processes of assessment.

A few authorities reported forcibly that the most effective approach to dyslexia was to guide staff in the assessment and identification of needs rather than to identify dyslexia as a means of accessing resources, support and provision. A small number did not hold to a specific view and were concerned about linking resources to the categorisation of a disability. Others rejected any approach which appeared to isolate one particular disability as unhelpful, citing that many children experienced associated difficulties.

To assist in identifying schools where good practice initiatives in the field of dyslexia featured, HMIE carried out a detailed survey of all education authorities in Scotland.

The key issues raised in the survey of education authorities included:

- the views held and description of dyslexia used by authorities;
- the range of provision including early intervention schemes, specialist units and resources and specialist teachers;
- teaching approaches, programmes and technological support used across the authority;
- opportunities for staff to undertake training and professional development related to dyslexia and the number of teaching staff with specialist qualifications;

2 Literature Review of Current Approaches to the Provision of Education for Children with Dyslexia, Dely L Elliott, Julia K Davidson and Jon Lewin, HM Inspectorate of Education, May 2007.

3 British Psychological Society, Division of Educational and Child Psychology Working party Report, 1999.



- research into the effectiveness of the authority's approaches to meet the needs of learners with dyslexia; and
- effective practice in meeting the needs of children and young people with dyslexia.

Provision across authorities varied. Some had developed whole-authority and whole-school approaches to addressing dyslexia, including accredited approaches. Nevertheless, good practice existed in many schools which had adopted alternative or non-accredited approaches.

The aim of this report is to help schools, colleges and universities to take forward improvements by describing good and improving practice in addressing the needs of learners with dyslexia. Research suggests<sup>4</sup> that when learners are given appropriate support, this can make a positive difference to their emotional and learning development as well as their overall achievement. This report highlights the most effective forms of support for learners in Scottish schools and colleges and provides signposts for improvement. It also describes the key strengths and areas for development.

### Description of evaluative terms used in this report

The following words are used to describe numbers and proportions throughout the report:

almost all	over 90%
most	75-90%
majority	50-74%
less than half	15-49%
few	up to 15%

<sup>4</sup> 'Journal of Educational Psychology', 88(4) pp601-638. Vellutino F. (1996).

## 2. THE RANGE AND QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING APPROACHES USED TO SUPPORT LEARNERS WITH DYSLEXIA

- Programmes to support pupils' learning.
- Pupils' progress and attainment.
- Quality of pupils' learning experiences.

The range and quality of learning and teaching approaches used to support learners with dyslexia were appropriate in the majority of schools and very effective in a few. Where teachers and support for learning staff had specialist qualifications or training, the quality of learning and teaching was often high and children with dyslexia were more likely to be identified at an earlier stage, and appropriate learning and teaching strategies and resources put in place promptly. In some of these schools, practice was innovative, making full use of the wider learning environment of the school and its community. Parents and pupils in these schools were confident that such approaches had helped pupils to make progress and pupils had positive learning experiences.

A few authorities offered specialist facilities for children with dyslexia, such as a language centre or literacy base. Almost all such facilities offered direct support to young people for part of the week and outreach support at a mainstream primary school. Specialist centres or bases were sometimes difficult to access and most were for pupils at the primary stages only. A few authorities had recently taken part in a transition programme<sup>5</sup> to prepare P7 pupils with dyslexia for secondary school, some involving parents. These programmes were helpful in addressing issues related to self-esteem and preparing children for their new setting. Other services included systems for tracking pupils'

progress, and mentoring for teachers by an advisor on dyslexia. Around half of authorities offered no specialist facilities, although children with dyslexia were often supported effectively by educational psychologists, learning assistants or network support staff. Eight authorities had specialist teachers, centrally deployed teachers or education officers whose main focus was on dyslexia. Most authorities reported that specialist teachers were effective but limited in number.

Most authorities considered that the key features of effective learning and teaching for children and young people with dyslexia should be multi-sensory, well structured and interactive and that they should raise self-esteem and be relevant and meaningful. Pupils responded well to self-help strategies when these were offered, for example, voice-activated computer programs and mind mapping. Many pupils felt that these strategies encouraged independence.

The majority had adopted a range of approaches which reflected a shared understanding of the way young people learn. Learning and teaching approaches often comprised:

- metacognitive approaches<sup>6</sup>
- small group and one-to-one teaching
- reciprocal teaching<sup>7</sup>
- scaffolding<sup>8</sup>
- reading recovery<sup>9</sup>
- synthetic phonics
- structured phonics programmes<sup>10</sup>

5 The Dyslexia at Transition Project Team consisted of staff from Edinburgh, Strathclyde and Aberdeen Universities and education authorities. The team worked with school staff, parents and pupils to produce a DVD and support pack 'Dyslexia at Transition'. The DVD, commissioned by the (then) Scottish Executive, was launched in 2007 and provides examples of best practice to help schools to support the move of pupils with dyslexia from primary to secondary school

6 In his book, 'Metacognition', (1976), Flavell J refers to 'metacognition' (P323) as developing 'knowledge of one's own cognitive processes'. When applied in education, it is a method which develops and encourages learners to understand better and control their own learning.

7 Reciprocal teaching is a method in which a teacher and learner alternate roles. It involves developing learners' skills in predicting, questioning, summarising and clarifying.

8 Scaffolding approaches include 'help sheets' used to assist learners who experience difficulty in developing their ideas in writing. 'Help sheets' usually provide learners with a framework for writing which includes prompts in the form of sentences or phrases and vocabulary which help learners to develop their ideas in writing.

9 Reading recovery is an intensive reading programme that aims to help children experiencing reading difficulties to catch up with their peers. Developed by New Zealand educationalist, Dr Marie Clay (1970), it focuses on the development of phonological awareness and using contextual information to assist reading.

10 Structured phonics programmes develop incrementally, learners' understanding of the relationship between the letters and the letter sound in the English language.

- paired reading with peers
- paired reading with parents
- differentiation
- multi-sensory teaching<sup>11</sup>
- preferred learning styles
- support for learning as an option choice at secondary school
- intensive support for early literacy.

The best practices developed for pupils with dyslexia were adopted in some authorities for all learners. For example, learners found that the display of visual prompts was helpful. One example of an inclusive project involved blocks of multi-sensory teaching which proved successful in raising the attainment of all pupils.

Almost all authorities were able to describe a very wide range of multi-sensory resources used to support learning. However, sometimes within the same school cluster, staff used a range of assessment tools and teachers varied significantly in their awareness and use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learners. In a few authorities, a specialist ICT support teacher made specific recommendations for support for pupils with dyslexia. These recommendations frequently included the use of voice-activated software, dictaphones and word processors. The sensory impairment support team in one authority was exploring the use of the DAISY<sup>12</sup> system.

Some authorities reported that Irlen's<sup>13</sup> approaches had helped individual pupils to make progress in their learning using coloured filters to help pupils to overcome a range of difficulties including attention, perception, light sensitivity and reading and writing.

### **The quality of learning and teaching approaches in pre-school centres**

Over a third of authorities identified early intervention schemes in pre-school provision as a means of ensuring that concerns about children's development would be addressed at an early stage. The best of these schemes focused on developing foundations of literacy and building children's language skills and self-confidence. Teachers in these centres used a range of teaching approaches, focusing on integrating language and the visual and motor components of reading, spelling and writing. Almost all nursery teachers felt that a multi-sensory learning and teaching approach focusing on phonological awareness was most effective in developing children's pre-literacy skills. In almost all centres, children with additional support needs had individualised educational programmes (IEPs). Increasingly, effective systems ensured that one member of staff knew a child well and took responsibility for individual planning. In the case of children with more complex needs, a key worker provided a consistent link with agencies and families.

### **The quality of learning and teaching approaches in primary schools.**

Almost all primary schools used multi-sensory reading schemes<sup>14</sup>. Specialist teachers commented on the positive impact of these schemes on pupils' reading. Most schools selected approaches from a range of strategies including:

- touch typing
- paired reading with an older reading partner
- scribing
- laptop computers and Alphasmarts
- phonics programmes.

11 Multi-sensory teaching programmes use the senses including visual, auditory and concrete clues to assist learners to understand the meaning of words and overcome reading and writing difficulties. They provide memory hooks for pupils to remember the sound or shape of words, for reading, or spelling.

12 The DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) is an open, international standard for accessible multimedia. The DAISY Consortium was set up in Switzerland by leading not-for-profit organisations from around the world serving blind and dyslexic people in order to develop and maintain the standard.

13 Helen Irlen's method has been used for over 25 years to identify and help people with a type of processing problem called Irlen Syndrome, formerly known as Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome (SSS). Irlen Syndrome is described as a problem with the brain's ability to process visual information. This problem tends to run in families and is not currently identified by other tests.

14 The most common multi-sensory reading scheme generally used in the upper primary school and secondary schools builds up children's word attack skills in very small steps for short but regular periods using initial letter blends, visual cues and blending of chunks of words.

A few primary schools had developed successful transition groups which engaged learners in confidence-building activities, role play, self-help strategies and sharing of experiences. The most innovative schools provided a multi-sensory learning environment with a range of prompts to assist pupils' learning. Such prompts included daily planners or visual timetables of activities displayed on walls, attention to class layout to minimise distraction, seating plans, visual menus at lunchtime, cue cards to prompt pupils' responses, traffic light systems for pupils to let teachers know when they were experiencing difficulty, and concrete and tactile material and objects of reference. There were good examples of partnership working between schools and specialist support staff within authorities to jointly deliver active literacy programmes. These involved using language in real-life contexts.

#### **Supporting transitions**

*In one council, the Literacy Support service has a key role in supporting pupils with literacy difficulties in making the transition to secondary school. Pupils and parents feel well supported at a crucial time and the secondary schools value the liaison.*

In an increasing number of primary schools, staff took account of the range of difficulties associated with dyslexia by introducing fine motor skills programmes to improve co-ordination, and self-help strategies to encourage independence. Although parents welcomed these approaches and felt they had helped their children to make progress, a few were critical of delays in accessing such programmes and wanted them to be introduced at an earlier stage in the primary school. ICT was not well integrated into programmes of support and generally featured as an 'add on' to the curriculum. All pupils benefited from well-planned literacy programmes that developed phonological awareness including letter and word recognition, motor control and co-ordination and communication skills including speech formation.

#### **Programmes and resources**

*In one council, a network audit identified effective combinations of programmes and resources which have been very successful for a number of pupils across the authority. The direct input from the network specialist teachers and the support assistant has been very effective. Schools continued programmes set up by the specialist teachers and purchased resources to support these programmes. The success of this approach was evident in pre- and post-assessment results and in progress in meeting targets outlined in IEPs.*

#### **The quality of learning and teaching approaches in secondary schools.**

Almost all secondary schools, including independent schools, used a range of learning and teaching approaches which included multi-sensory reading programmes, paired reading for pupils in the lower stages, after-school study classes and lunchtime clubs. The frequency and regularity of these activities varied from daily to weekly depending on the staff available. Although support for learning staff often shared and modelled helpful learning and teaching strategies, which included subject-specific word lists and the use of mnemonics and differentiated resources and worksheets, the overall implementation of such approaches by teachers across schools was weak. Pupils expressed concern about inconsistency in their use across classes. Pupils' learning experiences varied significantly. A majority felt that extraction disrupted their progress. Some phonic programmes were not age-appropriate. In most schools, teachers had limited expertise in dealing with dyslexia and were not aware of other difficulties which co-occurred with dyslexia, including auditory, co-ordination and sequencing difficulties.

In most schools, including independent schools, learning and teaching focused too heavily on textbooks and activities on reading and writing. ICT was not readily accessible within the classroom or sufficiently integrated into pupils' learning

experiences. One independent school had developed a helpful system where pupils had a teacher who knew them well and took a special interest in their learning and progress. School librarians often provided effective support for pupils through literacy and reading groups held at lunchtimes.

### **Multi-disciplinary working**

*In one council, support for learning teams in three secondary schools are working with speech and language therapists to produce a resource for schools called 'Speaking Up for Scotland'. The approaches used in the project have benefited all children with difficulties in literacy and provide a very good example of partnership working to meet the needs of pupils with dyslexia.*

### **The range and quality of learning and teaching approaches in special schools including residential special schools and secure care accommodation**

Most day special schools offered a helpful range of supportive strategies across the curriculum which benefited all learners. The use of alternative communication strategies using pictures, symbols, photographs and objects of reference created a total communication environment. Children with dyslexia in these schools also often had complex learning difficulties. Most schools had good links with speech and language therapists who sometimes worked in partnership with staff to model good practice and advise on appropriate resources such as tactile material, including sand, to practise letter formation. The strong focus on life skills and personal and social development ensured that pupils had good opportunities to use appropriate language and communication in a meaningful context. The majority of special schools took good account of pupils' preferred learning styles. In specialist language units and centres, staff offered an imaginative range of approaches to learning and teaching, including very effective use of interactive whiteboards, audio resources and personalised dictionaries.

The experience and qualifications of staff in all residential special schools and secure care services strongly influenced the quality and range of teaching and learning experiences. Most offered a helpful and appropriate focus on developing pupils' life skills linked to literacy, numeracy and wider achievements. However, many young people, particularly in schools and units for those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, had experienced gaps in their education. In most services, there was no information about whether young people who were due to leave residential care had access to continuing support and to adult literacy schemes.

### **Key strengths**

- Innovative use of the school environment to support learning experiences in a few schools.
- Partnership working with speech and language therapists and specialist support staff modelling good practice and advising on appropriate resources.
- The strong focus on life skills and personal and social development in special schools and units which ensured that pupils had good opportunities to use appropriate language and communication in real-life contexts.

### **Areas for development**

- Teachers' knowledge of appropriate learning and teaching approaches for children and young people with dyslexia.
- Consistency of teachers' use of appropriate learning and teaching strategies, particularly in secondary schools.
- Use of ICT to support pupils' learning experiences.
- Access to adult literacy schemes for young people leaving school care accommodation services.

### 3. MEETING LEARNING NEEDS

- Effectiveness of approaches to identification.
- Range and effectiveness of assessment.
- Effectiveness in matching tasks and activities to individual pupils.

It was difficult to establish the extent of expertise, experience, staff development and specialist qualifications among teachers across Scotland from the information provided by authorities. A third of authorities were unable to provide any information about how many teachers had gained specialist qualifications in dyslexia between 2003 and 2007. Only one was able to provide a breakdown of staff with specialist qualifications in each sector for this period. Of the remainder, numbers varied significantly, ranging from individual authorities having between zero and twenty teachers in 2007. A few authorities provided information about small numbers of teachers who had undertaken post-graduate certificates or diplomas in support for learning but were unsure whether this included any modules on supporting dyslexia. Around a fifth had recorded approximately one or two teachers undertaking accredited courses per year.

Almost all authorities had detailed information about the attendance of teachers and support for learning assistants at in-house courses with a focus on dyslexia. In a few larger authorities, numbers accessing training were regularly 200 or more per year. Where an authority had specialist resources or centres with specialist staff who delivered outreach training and support, the number of teachers accessing specific staff development was considerably higher. Almost all authorities provided a range of training on dyslexia for support for learning assistants within the authority, often delivered by educational psychologists.

Only a small number of authorities held specific information about the number of children and young people with dyslexia for whom they currently provided support. Some authorities questioned the need for collecting such information within an inclusive system which does not categorise children. However, where such information was collated, it assisted authorities to

plan more effectively to meet learners' needs within their staged intervention processes. Those authorities which did not hold such information acknowledged that some children needed specialist support to acquire and maintain functional literacy skills and made provision within their staged intervention processes for supporting pupils who needed it.

In Gaelic medium settings, pupils with literacy difficulties may experience additional challenges when they begin to study English. The Gaelic community was taking positive steps within a national facility to develop and share resources designed specifically for pupils in Gaelic medium settings who experience difficulties with literacy.

#### **Meeting children's learning needs in pre-school centres**

Over a third of authorities identified early intervention schemes in pre-school provision as a means of ensuring that concerns about children's development would be tackled before they became problematic. The best practices emphasised the importance of developing foundations of literacy and building children's language skills and self-confidence. These practices used a range of teaching approaches, focusing on integrating language and the visual and motor components of reading, spelling and writing. The majority of authorities agreed that children who showed signs of difficulty in learning to read or spell needed to be assessed as early as possible. In the best practices, as soon as children were identified, the accuracy and fluency of their phonics skills were assessed. Any weaknesses or lack of fluency were then addressed using a variety of age-appropriate materials. A few authorities treated early intervention as a front-line educational strategy in addressing dyslexia. Much work had been done by psychologists and others in a few authorities to develop such approaches. However, almost all were reluctant to categorise communication difficulties formally as dyslexia at the pre-five and early primary school stages, instead assisting children to overcome developmental immaturities.



Although no centres specifically focused on dyslexia, in the best practice they implemented an authority drive on literacy. Many of these centres deployed an early intervention teacher who focused on supporting groups or providing individual support in play contexts for children experiencing difficulty with language, early literacy and communication. Group work focused on phonological awareness, syllables, rhyming and awareness of print. Along with centre staff, the early intervention teachers compiled a transition document for each primary school containing detailed information on each child's competency in literacy, alerting primary staff to any concerns. Primary schools found this very helpful in assisting them to meet all children's needs. Many pre-school centres which did not have early intervention teachers were also providing children with similarly effective learning experiences.

### **Early intervention**

*As part of its early intervention research programme one council carries out an annual, baseline assessment at the pre-school, primary 1 and 2 stages. The results of a research programme clearly demonstrate the impact of the literacy approaches being undertaken at the early stages. The authority also studies the impact of its programmes at transition stages between primary and secondary schools to ensure continuous progress and impact on pupils' learning.*

### **Meeting pupils' learning needs in primary schools**

In most primary schools, staff preferred to identify children's learning needs through assessments linked directly to programmes which built on pupils existing skills. These assessments provided a starting point, appropriate resources and a helpful means of monitoring and recording pupils' progress. Progress

would then be linked to IEP targets. Pupils benefited from early identification of potential language development problems and access to an individual programme with therapists. Where primary schools had teachers with additional qualifications, parents reported a difference in children's confidence in using self-help strategies. A few class teachers in 'dyslexia-friendly'<sup>15</sup> schools were skilled in differentiating tasks to meet learners' needs. In most schools, detailed information about pupils' needs was effectively transferred to secondary schools to ensure continuity of support. Many staff felt that transition arrangements had significantly improved. The best practices identified a range of opportunities to build children's self-confidence. Almost all pupils made good progress when they and their parents were directly involved in setting appropriate, specific and measurable targets within IEPs. Pupils with dyslexia also benefited where schools employed ongoing literacy profiles to track pupils' progress.

Information about pupils' learning needs was not always consistently or effectively passed on to all teachers. Many pupils were uncomfortable about explaining their difficulties to new or supply teachers. The provision of alternative assessment arrangements such as the use of ICT and readers and scribes in primary schools was inconsistent. Few parents and children were aware of the range of alternative forms of assessment. In Gaelic schools, early identification of pupils with dyslexia was a challenge as there were few Gaelic-speaking psychologists. Reading and writing in Gaelic starts at P1 and P2 and pupils begin to write in English at around P3 or P4. Pupils begin reading and writing English when they are competent in reading Gaelic. An advisory group with representations from education authorities had identified this issue and was looking at appropriate strategies and resources.<sup>16</sup>

15 Independent consultants have been running the Dyslexia-Friendly Schools Award Programme since 2002. Becoming a 'dyslexia-friendly' school requires a school to put in place changes to allow the early identification and assessment of children with dyslexia, and to put in place appropriate support processes for them. These changes are also intended to promote a change in culture within the school which leads to inclusion and understanding, not just of children with dyslexia, but of children with a range of additional support needs.

16 Storlann is a national resource centre with representations from education authorities which makes decisions about appropriate resources and strategies for meeting Gaelic learners' needs.

**Screening and assessment**

*In one council, pre-school screening for signs of learning difficulties including dyslexia has been effective in identifying and addressing the learning needs of children at an early stage. All Nursery Co-ordinator Teachers have had training and oversee the screening in all pre-school centres. There is an emphasis at this stage on pre-empting later difficulties, and not labelling children prematurely.*

*In another council, a phonological awareness screening initiative enables teachers of P1 classes to identify children who are at risk of literacy difficulties and provide them with effective support. Teachers are expected to monitor the progress of these pupils rigorously and provide them with curricular support on a class or small group basis using play.*

*In a third council, a multi-disciplinary consultative approach to the assessment and identification of dyslexia is being piloted within some of its learning communities with positive results.*

**Meeting pupils' learning needs in secondary schools**

In almost all secondary schools, support for learning staff were skilled at matching tasks to pupils' learning needs. Most programmes for individuals and groups were of a good standard and pupils felt that they were making progress. Almost all support for learning and visiting specialist staff were familiar with alternative assessment arrangements. The majority of staff felt that SQA results for those pupils with dyslexia had improved and they performed better than pupils had done in the past. In a few schools, including independent schools, senior pupils acted as peer tutors for younger pupils in subject classes. Teachers reported an improvement in the performance of pupils

receiving such support. Pupils' IEP targets were based on an holistic assessment and most schools had in place effective systems of referral. Schools had a range of assessment material to assist support for learning staff to identify learning needs. Transfer of information from primary to secondary about children with additional support needs, including those with dyslexia, was usually timeous and allowed support for learning staff to pass information to subject teachers prior to pupils' arrival in the school. The involvement of psychological services in transitional planning had improved outcomes for pupils including those with dyslexia. However, not all teachers made sufficient use of this information to guide their teaching and planning to meet pupils' needs. A particularly good example of practice involved close monitoring and tracking of the progress of learners with dyslexia. Schools arranged conferences for pupils to identify inconsistencies across the school and share their experiences of effective practices. Classwork and homework were seldom differentiated effectively in most schools. In addition, few secondary subject teachers had sufficient awareness of accessibility legislation and their responsibilities within this legislation to support pupils to access the curriculum.<sup>17</sup> Often, pupils had an understanding of their own difficulties which enabled them to ask teachers for appropriate support. Senior pupils with dyslexia benefited from links with Careers Scotland's ACTIVATE<sup>18</sup> programme.

In independent primary and secondary schools, support for learning staff targeted learners' needs through small group teaching, usually by extraction. Examination arrangements were well developed in independent secondary schools but differentiation of tasks to meet learners' needs within subject classes was patchy. A few schools had published assessment materials and resources. In the best practices, most staff recognised that the learning and teaching strategies adapted for pupils

<sup>17</sup> The Education (Disabilities and Pupils Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002, requires education authorities and independent schools (as responsible bodies) to ensure that teachers provide access to the curriculum, the physical environment of the school and school information. Responsible bodies are also obliged to produce a plan setting out targets for improving access in consultation with stakeholders. The plan is revised on a three year basis.

<sup>18</sup> ACTIVATE is an experiential careers education programme delivered by Careers Scotland Advisers to support young people with additional support needs.



with dyslexia were the same approaches that worked for all pupils. These schools made very effective use of multi-sensory teaching in both primary and secondary school departments. In one independent school, pupils benefited from access to a range of therapists including an orthoptist<sup>19</sup>, an auditory therapist<sup>20</sup> and a movement therapist.

### Meeting pupils' learning needs in special schools including residential special schools and secure care accommodation

In day special and residential special schools, staff provided considerable individual support to meet learners' needs. Although a few residential special schools were improving approaches to meeting learners' needs across care and education, such joint approaches were often at an early stage of development. In secure care services, children were usually assessed on arrival, for example, before moving on to an allocated class. In the best practices, day special and residential special schools offered a range of therapeutic interventions including emotional literacy programmes<sup>21</sup>. Staff reported that these therapeutic interventions had a positive effect on learning outcomes for young people. However, only a few schools had good access to these. In language centres and specialist units, staff offered a highly structured curriculum framework emphasising core phonics, shared learning intentions, imaginative language prompts, visual prompts, ICT and interactive activities and oral learning. Although learners' needs were generally well met by these specialist centres, partner schools varied in their response to outreach support.

### **Use of ICT to support learning**

*Since 2003-2004, the support service in one council has promoted a substantial investment in support software across the council. This inclusive approach resulted in the council being one of the first authorities to make specific software applications readily available to all pupils, particularly those with dyslexia. Currently one particular application is being provided to all primary schools.*

### Key strengths

- Positive steps being taken to exploit the work of a national Gaelic resource centre to develop and share resources designed specifically for Gaelic medium pupils with dyslexia.
- The quality of assessments when linked directly to programmes of study
- The impact on pupils' attainments of access to appropriate SQA alternative assessment arrangements.
- The role of assessment classes in residential special schools in identifying and meeting learners' needs.

### Areas for development

- Awareness among teachers of accessibility legislation and their role within that legislation.
- The limited range of therapeutic interventions to support learners' needs.
- The information held centrally in authorities about staff qualifications and continuing professional development.

<sup>19</sup> An orthoptist investigates, and addresses weaknesses of binocular vision and eye movement.

<sup>20</sup> An auditory therapist teaches a child to develop hearing as a more active sense.

<sup>21</sup> Emotional literacy programmes and Reasoning and Reacting take a rounded view of the learner and focus on building confidence and self-esteem.

## 4. PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Encouragement given to parents to be involved in their children's learning.
- Procedures for communicating with parents.
- Information to parents about the school's work including training.
- Encouragement given to children and young people to be involved in and to make choices about their own learning.

Almost all parents were invited to attend reviews of their children's progress and contribute to their targets set within IEPs. The quality of information to parents varied with some information provided on local authority websites and most through leaflets and policies which were available to parents on request. However, very few parents or pupils were sufficiently informed about the education authority's or school's policy related to dyslexia. Similarly, the extent to which schools involved parents and pupils in setting targets varied. Most schools informed parents about the targets rather than involving them in setting targets. Parents were critical of long delays in accessing specialist support for their children though that was in the belief that only with such support could their child progress. Schools were often slow to respond to parents' initial concerns despite provision for seeking assessment being available through additional support for learning legislation. A notable number of parents described significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in their children where, in their opinion, support was inadequate.

### Partnership with parents, children and young people in pre-school centres

Almost all pre-school centres had good links with parents of children with additional support needs, mostly due to concerns about children's maturity. Some research shows<sup>22</sup> that earlier intervention is very effective for learners with dyslexia and that it is the parents of children who are often the first to raise concerns. Most pre-school centres provide support while avoiding 'labelling'. Close collaboration between staff and parents at this

stage ensures that parents and carers are more informed and aware of the positive role they can play in supporting their children's learning.

### Primary schools and partnership with parents and children

Most primary schools involved parents in a range of ways to support their children. These included termly attendance at IEP review meetings, additional time at parents' evenings, home-school diaries and opportunities to meet with an educational psychologist, particularly around transition times to secondary school. A few primary schools shared their support for learning policy with parents and offered information sessions about the difficulties experienced by their children and ways in which parents could provide support. The best practices included children directly in developing IEP targets and encouraged them to attend reviews of their progress. Most children felt that they were making progress with appropriate help. However, a few felt that reading material was sometimes not age-appropriate and failed to engage their interest.

Some parents were not confident that the school had recognised their own difficulties with literacy and did not have the confidence to raise issues relating to their children. Although most schools had offered sessions on awareness of dyslexia, these were not organised frequently enough to avoid missing newer parents.

#### **Building pupils' confidence and self-esteem**

*Many schools in one council used a range of initiatives to build pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. Schools prepared pupils for SQA examinations by ensuring that, where possible, the same person read and scribed for pupils with dyslexia to enable relationships to be built. Schools in two remoter areas worked closely with pupils due to transfer to secondary school in order to identify their preferred support strategies. Teachers ensured that secondary schools were aware of pupils' learning styles, including strengths, and preferred support strategies prior to transfer.*

<sup>22</sup> Literature Review of Current Approaches to the Provision of Education for Children with Dyslexia, p33, Elliot DL, Davidson K and Lewin J, April 2007.

### **Partnership with parents and young people in secondary schools**

Parents felt that support for learning staff in secondary schools were approachable and knowledgeable about dyslexia. In independent schools with a primary and secondary department, this view was particularly notable. Almost all parents and most pupils described very positive relationships with support for learning staff whom they regarded as the key contact in schools. Most parents felt that schools made good attempts to promote their children's wider achievements by providing them with opportunities to attend a range of clubs and youth projects. Some were encouraged to participate in the Scottish Youth Parliament. A few parents disliked pastoral care systems where guidance staff changed periodically and preferred continuity through the same guidance teacher or a key worker system where a member of staff acted at times as an advocate on behalf of their children. In most secondary schools, parents were consulted about appropriate targets set within IEPs through attendance at reviews of their children's progress. However, in the majority of schools, pupils needed to be involved more with the development of their own targets.

### **Partnership with parents and young people in special schools including residential special schools and secure care accommodation**

In a few special schools, parents experienced difficulties travelling to schools if their children were placed some distance from home, or in another authority. This was particularly true of residential special and secure care services. All of these services took good account of the distance that parents had to travel. To address this problem, most made effective arrangements for key staff to visit or contact families at home directly. A few had set up parent support groups to encourage parents to provide support for each other. All parents of children attending units and language centres offering specialist support for children with dyslexia felt that they were encouraged to become more

involved with their children's learning. All had visited the centres or units and a few had appreciated the opportunity to observe specialist classes. Home-school diaries were well used to communicate with parents in day special schools and units. Almost all parents received regular reports about their children's progress and attended regular reviews. Almost all pupils felt that they were making progress and had benefited from additional specialist support, particularly those attending residential special schools who had significant gaps in their previous school attendance. In common with children and young people with dyslexia attending mainstream schools, pupils felt that they were insufficiently involved in setting targets within their IEPs.

### **Resolving disagreements**

Section 16 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, requires education authorities to put in place procedures to resolve disputes which arise between the authority and any parents or young people belonging to the local authority's area. Authorities have a duty to ensure that parents are aware of these procedures in cases where a dispute arises between parents and the responsible authority. Such approaches are intended to resolve disagreements or prevent them from escalating into more serious disputes.<sup>23</sup> Provisions to resolve disagreements include independent, free mediation services where a mediator acts as an impartial third party; dispute resolution by independent adjudication where an adjudicator reviews a case and makes recommendations on meeting a child's needs; and Additional Support Needs Tribunals where issues relating to co-ordinated support plans are decided.

### **Key strengths**

- Parents' involvement in their children's review of progress.
- The knowledge and approachability of most support for learning staff in linking with parents and providing appropriate curriculum support.

<sup>23</sup> Chapter 7 of 'Supporting Children's Learning, Code of Practice', Scottish Executive, Edinburgh 2005 provides details about the forms of mediation and dispute resolution for which the Act makes provision.

- Learning strategies which helped pupils to overcome difficulties independently.
- Effectiveness of arrangements for key staff in special schools and residential special schools to visit pupils and their families at home to provide support.

**Areas for development**

- Involving parents and young people in setting targets in IEPs.
- Delays in obtaining an assessment of children who may have dyslexia.
- Delays in providing the right support for children with dyslexia.
- Raising awareness among parents of difficulties associated with dyslexia and helpful support strategies.

## 5. STAFF TRAINING, REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT

- Quality of advice, training and continuing professional development.
- Confidence of newly qualified teachers in recognising dyslexia.
- Knowledge and understanding of dyslexia.
- Shared understanding of approaches to supporting children with dyslexia across the establishment.

Few authorities held information centrally about staff qualifications or continuing professional development courses undertaken by staff specifically relevant to dyslexia. Where authorities had carried out a training audit, this was not always taken into account in their strategic planning to meet learners' needs. The quality and extent of staff training in schools was inconsistent. A few authorities provided a clear and supportive framework which covered training opportunities. Most offered optional, informative twilight courses which could be accessed by teachers within a catalogue of continuing professional development. However, with the exception of 'dyslexia-friendly' schools, which offered regular training updates delivered in-house, specific training was offered on an irregular basis by schools, often with long gaps between training sessions of up to five years. This had a particular impact on new, temporary or supply staff. In all authorities, support for learning staff were the most confident overall in their knowledge and understanding of dyslexia. Almost all had a key role to play in delivering appropriate training for staff within their schools and services. Newly qualified teachers were not confident in identifying and addressing the needs of children and young people with dyslexia. Most 'learned on the job', supported by other teachers.

### Quality of advice and support in pre-school centres

The majority of pre-school centres were satisfied with the support and advice provided to staff by education authority officers, particularly in relation to the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. Additional support was provided directly by specialist teachers in those

centres located within or attached to primary schools. Although almost all centres received some form of phonological awareness training, there were very few examples of awareness raising about early indicators of dyslexia. A small number of authorities had produced helpful guidelines for their early years staff on early identification of literacy difficulties or pre-school screening guidelines which included signs of literacy difficulties. The intention of such guidelines was to ensure that children whose profiles were a cause for concern received the appropriate intervention at the earliest stage in their education. Educational psychologists played a key role in working with centres to develop appropriate forms of intervention.

### Training and staff development in primary schools

In primary schools where teachers had undertaken additional qualifications or modules from universities specifically related to dyslexia, teachers felt more confident in recognising indicators of dyslexia and addressing children's needs. Such schools also had a broader range of appropriate resources to support learners. A few authorities had issued helpful booklets of support strategies to both teachers and parents to encourage consistency. These practical resources were valued by class teachers. Almost all teachers working in special units and language centres had undertaken some form of specific training or additional specialist qualifications. These 'specialist' staff often acted as consultants to colleagues in cluster or partner schools. In 'dyslexia-friendly' primary schools, all staff had good access to regular in-house training. A few schools offered as many as three sessions per year in addition to drop-in or support sessions for all staff with the support for learning teacher and learning support co-ordinator. This training was further supplemented by learning support teachers who modelled learning and teaching approaches for class teachers and support for learning assistants. Teachers found that they gained confidence and additional skills through this form of sharing practice. The majority of schools had developed some form of staff development library which contained a variety of useful advice about

how to support children with additional support needs including dyslexia. Providing sufficient time to specialist teachers and support for learning assistants for consultation with class teachers was a constant challenge. A few schools enabled teachers to cascade good practice across other schools in their local authority. A few provided staff with opportunities to reflect on and develop their practice as a team to ensure consistency.

### **Training and staff development in secondary schools**

Across authorities and secondary schools, the quality of training was variable. One authority offered training on-line and used its educational psychologists to provide professional development for school staff. In almost all schools, support for learning staff had received at least a basic level of training and felt confident that they could identify and meet the needs of learners with dyslexia. Most support for learning staff demonstrated a good understanding of resources for assessment and intervention, some of which they had developed themselves. Such resources often included a handbook for teachers with practical strategies for subject teachers in supporting pupils with additional support needs including dyslexia. Most had offered seminars or workshops for interested staff. However, these sessions were not delivered regularly and most support strategies focused on visual discrepancy although not all pupils with dyslexia are affected by this. Newly qualified teachers received specific training from most schools and authorities although the quality and quantity of their professional development sessions varied. Too few schools evaluated the effectiveness and impact on pupils' learning of their own training and of the strategies used by subject teachers. Most subject teachers wanted help and advice in ensuring the experiences on offer met the needs of learners. The main focus of in-class support was English and mathematics, although pupils experienced literacy difficulties across the curriculum.

A few secondary schools were using Dyslexia Scotland's 'subject specific' guidelines and resources. These materials had been issued widely.

In the most effective practices, technical words which were likely to cause difficulty in a subject were identified and explained. In a few authorities, Dyslexia Scotland offered well-received 'twilight' sessions.

Most newly qualified teachers reported that they did not have sufficient awareness of the issues relating to dyslexia or a secure grasp of methodology and strategies that could be used to teach literacy and numeracy skills to all children. The quality of training in independent schools depended to a large extent on the nature of the provision, and the qualifications and expertise of staff. In some schools, a very high degree of expertise existed and all members of the support for learning department held a formal qualification relating to dyslexia. However, staff in independent schools were not always clear about their legal obligations or responsibilities relating to accessibility. A few were unaware of basic support strategies.

#### ***Using digital examination arrangements to support independence***

*In one council, pupils have experienced independence and success through the use of Digital Examination arrangements. One school uses a 'dyslexia-friendly' approach with specific input to staff, pupils and parents.*

### **Training and staff development in special schools including residential special schools and secure care accommodation**

Local authorities ensured that staff from day special schools attended training events and funded staff to attend external courses. Dyslexia was not considered a priority for staff development in schools where children and young people had a range of additional support needs. Nevertheless in almost all schools, the close monitoring of IEP targets meant that many staff had become skilled in setting appropriate targets to help pupils to make progress with their language and communication. In many cases, teachers received considerable support and advice from speech and language



therapists to assist them in setting appropriate targets. All special and mainstream schools which had sought advice and training on digital examinations for pupils undertaking SQA qualifications, had commended the support and advice provided by voluntary agencies.

In the best practices in residential special schools and secure care services, care staff worked alongside teachers to deliver language and communication targets. A few teachers had achieved modules from universities specifically relating to dyslexia. Most residential care workers had undertaken SVQ qualifications at level 3 and many had undertaken degree courses in social work including pastoral care to support young people's needs more effectively. A small number of services had used the Transitions DVD, produced by the Scottish Executive and the Dyslexia at Transition project team, to raise awareness of dyslexia issues at transition. Although staff varied considerably in their understanding of and confidence in meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia, many teachers had developed their own knowledge of dyslexia through personal research. All staff needed to be trained to at least a basic level of understanding of dyslexia.

### **Key strengths**

- The role of support for learning support staff and educational psychologists in delivering appropriate in-house training for staff within their schools and services.
- The work of voluntary agencies in promoting good practice and providing training, advice and support on digital examinations and ICT, appropriate resources and training, advice and support for a wide range of schools, colleges and agencies.

### **Areas for development**

- The quality and extent of professional development in schools and across authorities.
- The content of courses on additional support needs, including dyslexia in university faculties of education.
- Frequency and regularity of professional development in schools relating to appropriate support strategies.
- Staff confidence in, and understanding of strategies to address learners' needs in residential special schools and secure care services.

## 6. PLANNING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA IN SCHOOLS

- Quality of planning at education authority level.
- Quality of planning at establishment level – whole school policies and approaches.
- Shared understanding of the concept of dyslexia.
- Quality assurance and self-evaluation.

The quality of planning varied notably across authorities and between schools. Almost all authorities planned provision for children and young people with dyslexia within broader policies for inclusion, support for learning or additional support needs. Schools in these authorities used a similar approach. In the few authorities which had policies for 'dyslexia-friendly' schools many individual schools had developed their own policies on dyslexia. In such schools, staff demonstrated a clearer understanding of dyslexia and its impact. These authorities tended to locate literacy difficulties within a staged intervention framework. As a consequence, planning in schools was generally more effective. In the best practices, staff used a comprehensive set of data to monitor and track pupils' progress and evaluate the impact of learning and teaching strategies and the use of resources to support learning. Self-evaluation of practice in meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia was not a key feature of practice in most schools.

### Strategic planning

Most authorities had steering groups with remits for additional support needs including provision for learners with dyslexia. Around a fifth had set up advisory or steering groups which developed strategic approaches to meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia. In these authorities, schools were more aware of the range of strategies to support children and young people. One authority had appointed both an advisory group and a designated education officer and had highly effective programme of training for 'dyslexia-friendly' schools which aimed to meet the needs of pupils with dyslexia.

### **Dyslexia-friendly schools**

*In one authority, all primary and secondary schools had gained the Dyslexia-Friendly Schools Award by end March 2007. The award was based on an external consultant's evaluation of the effectiveness of schools in meeting the needs of pupils with dyslexia. One member of staff in each school had been trained as an advisor on dyslexia. Schools had structured continuing professional development programmes and systems for tracking pupils' progress. Most children with dyslexia at the primary and secondary stages were making notable progress.*

This approach has been adopted by other authorities, for example, by two councils working in partnership to produce a 'dyslexia-friendly' resource pack.

### Planning in pre-school and at the primary stages

Planning to deal specifically with children with dyslexia at the pre-school stages was deemed to be inappropriate. Planning in most primary schools was not based on a specific policy on dyslexia unless they were a 'dyslexia-friendly' establishment. However, a 'dyslexia-friendly' policy was not essential for good practice to be present. Planning in the best practices was based on meeting the needs of individual pupils through IEPs and, where appropriate, co-ordinated support plans. In the best practices, planning had encouraged close working relationships among staff from the school and other agencies.

### Planning at the secondary stages

In authorities with a specific policy on supporting young people with dyslexia, planning to meet the needs of learners with dyslexia in secondary schools was more effective. Support for learning staff demonstrated a shared understanding of dyslexia and staff in general had a greater understanding of the barriers to learning experienced by pupils with dyslexia. Most schools with specific policies on



dyslexia had well-established assessment arrangements with SQA and information-sharing protocols to ensure that staff were aware of pupils' needs. In the most effective practice, the information was also shared with pupils.

Although most support for pupils staff shared information effectively with subject teachers about pupils experiencing difficulties with their learning, teachers in some subjects did not make use of individualised learning plans or show appropriate awareness of pupils' needs. Planning to meet pupils' needs was not embedded in teaching practices and planning for differentiation across subject departments was often inconsistent. Self-evaluation was not a strong feature of planning and most schools needed to review their procedures for identifying and assessing pupils with dyslexia within whole school approaches to identifying and meeting learners' needs.

#### **Planning in special schools including residential special schools and secure care accommodation**

In special schools, all pupils have additional support needs. Most special schools demonstrated a strong focus on literacy and robust screening in order to identify individual needs. Programmes were individualised in order to meet specific needs and all pupils had IEPs.

There were examples of well-thought-out approaches in a small number of secure care services. In these services, senior managers made very good use of tracking systems which provided up-to-date details about young people's additional

support needs and prior achievements including accreditation. Such practice allowed the service to source information rapidly and respond quickly and appropriately to the needs of young people. In one service, young people benefited from placement in an induction class to allow detailed assessment and acclimatisation to a new learning environment. New pupils were also interviewed in order to establish their preferred learning styles and to select the most helpful resources. Young people with dyslexia found this particularly helpful. In many services, however, dyslexia was often masked by social, emotional and behavioural difficulties which were the main focus of support. The quality and extent of multi-agency planning to support young people varied.

#### **Key strengths**

- The impact of schools with specific policies and approaches to dealing with dyslexia (for example, 'dyslexia-friendly' schools) on pupils' progress.
- The key role of language centres as part of a staged intervention process to support schools and children and young people with dyslexia.
- Systems for rapid assessment and meeting individual needs used in secure care services.

#### **Areas for development**

- Planning to meet the needs of learners with dyslexia across authorities.
- Personalising aspects of the curriculum to meet pupils' needs in secondary schools.
- Quality assurance linked to planning to meet the needs of learners with dyslexia.

## 7. LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Strategic management of provision.
- Quality of teamwork and partnerships for supporting children and young people.
- Creative and innovative approaches used to meet learners' needs.
- Self-evaluation.
- Capacity for continuous improvement.

The strategic management of provision for children and young people with dyslexia depended largely on the level of commitment of authorities and schools. Approaches to strategic management varied, especially in relation to identification and intervention. Most authorities and schools had developed early intervention programmes with a focus on literacy and programmes of support for pupils in the later stages of primary school and in secondary school. A few authorities had developed creative and innovative approaches although these were not widely shared. At authority level, quality assurance of provision was normally located within accessibility strategies or inclusion policies. Aspects of these strategies, policies, or authority-level improvement plans were often reflected in school improvement plans.

Around a third of authorities had carried out an evaluation of the effectiveness of provision to support learners with dyslexia. In the best practices, this included taking account of the views of learners. In the majority of cases, authorities had sought information about the use of ICT in meeting needs. Given the general scarcity of data on both the numbers of pupils with dyslexia and the extent of expertise and experience among teachers, there was considerable scope for authorities to determine more accurately the effectiveness of services in meeting the needs of learners.

### Leadership and quality assurance at the pre-school stages

All early years managers and headteachers of pre-school centres worked closely with education authorities and a range of partner agencies to ensure that children's needs were met. Almost all

adopted what they considered to be proactive approaches to preventing difficulties associated with developing phonological awareness. All headteachers expressed reservations about early indicators of dyslexia.

#### **Focusing on spoken language**

*In one council, a Spoken Language Initiative – a joint venture between education and speech and language therapist services – has been piloted in one cluster. This package supports nursery schools and classes in promoting speaking and listening, placing a strong emphasis on co-operative, multi-agency working.*

### Leadership and quality assurance in primary schools

In primary schools, the empathy and awareness of the headteacher and senior managers was a key factor in the effectiveness of the school in meeting learners' needs. The impact on learners' progress was particularly marked where schools were well supported and strategically managed at authority level in meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia. Important approaches encouraged by senior managers in developing a 'dyslexia-friendly' ethos included:

- making time for effective teamwork among class teachers, support for learning teachers and visiting specialists;
- monitoring and evaluating children's learning experiences and the appropriateness of IEP targets for meeting the learning and personal and social development needs of children with dyslexia;
- ensuring opportunities for children to experience success and receive reassurance;
- developing a well-structured learning environment;
- sourcing opportunities for staff development; and
- planning effective transition arrangements for children going to secondary school.

### **Leadership and quality assurance in secondary schools**

In most secondary schools, senior managers consciously attempted to promote a culture of inclusion where class teachers were responsible for meeting the needs of pupils with dyslexia, supported and advised by specialist staff. Most evaluated how effectively they met learners' needs, as part of an annual cycle of quality assurance and improvement planning. Almost all secondary schools were improving links with primary schools and many had evaluated their transition links in this respect. However, planning at the post-sixteen transition stage was an area of relative weakness. Many parents were unaware of post-sixteen assessment arrangements and the implications for pupils entering further and higher education. Schools needed to provide parents with more information and at an earlier stage. Important approaches encouraged by senior managers in developing a 'dyslexia-friendly' ethos included:

- a strong emphasis on early intervention and solution-focused approaches;
- high quality learning support accommodation including ICT provision and a range of appropriate resources;
- staged intervention processes which ensured that pupils were identified at an early stage;
- taking good account of the needs of pupils needing more choices and more chances;
- regular monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress at reviews;
- effective links with partner agencies, where appropriate, to support pupils and families as required; and
- a culture of inclusion.

### **Leadership and quality assurance in special schools including residential special schools and secure care accommodation**

Most special schools had senior managers who were very knowledgeable about support strategies

for young people experiencing difficulties with their learning. Very few had specific policies or guidelines on meeting the needs of pupils with dyslexia. Many had designed their curriculum and learning and teaching approaches to support all children who experienced literacy and numeracy difficulties including those with dyslexia. For example, language was often taught within helpful and meaningful contexts using the local community and often linked to the development of life skills. Pupils' IEP targets were monitored frequently and pupils benefited from the individualised support offered through class team approaches to supporting pupils. In independent residential special schools, the range of resources often depended on the finances available. The majority of headteachers experienced difficulty in retaining and acquiring staff with specialist qualifications. Although care staff were committed to helping children and young people in school care accommodation, very few had training and enhanced knowledge about support strategies for young people with dyslexia.

### **Key strengths**

- Steps taken by many senior managers to promote a culture of inclusion.
- When working well, staged intervention processes which ensure that pupils' needs are identified at an early stage.

### **Areas for development**

- Sharing creative and innovative practices across authorities and schools.
- Managing approaches to identifying pupils with dyslexia and providing support to them.
- Planning to meet the needs of young people at the post-sixteen transition stage in local authority and independent secondary schools.
- Awareness of appropriate support strategies for children and young people with dyslexia across education and care in residential special schools.

## 8. AN OVERVIEW OF PROVISION FOR STUDENTS IN SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES

Of the colleges sampled, there were many strong features of provision for students with dyslexia. Colleges adopted a similar approach to schools in meeting individual learners' needs through a combination of specialist support and collaboration with subject lecturers. Almost all colleges used the term 'dyslexia', mainly because it was widely recognised. Some had previously used the term 'specific learning difficulties' because it was, in their opinion, a more accurate description of this type of difficulty. Subject lecturers welcomed the additional support and advice of the specialist departments and consulted regularly with them about appropriate resources and strategies to support learners.

Overall, there was adequate funding to support learners in those colleges which participated in the evaluation, including a good range of resources and technology. However, there were differences among colleges in approaches to funding assessments. A few would only provide funding if the learner was studying at Higher National Certificate level and wanted to apply for a student disability allowance. Learners undertaking non-advanced programmes received support which could include borrowing ICT equipment as required.

### Assessing and supporting learners with dyslexia

Support for learning or learner development services or departments took responsibility for assessing and supporting learners with dyslexia and arranged, where appropriate for an assessment. Students with dyslexia were then assisted by support for learning staff, in collaboration with curriculum staff. Most colleges encouraged disclosure on application, at the interview stage and during enrolment and induction. Learner Services staff also gave presentations to all class groups at induction to ensure all learners were aware of the support systems in place to help them reach their potential. In one college that was

particularly effective, an extended learning support team screened students for dyslexia on arrival. Learners were then encouraged to self-refer at any point throughout the programme. In the best practices, all staff took responsibility for meeting the needs of these learners. Most departments had identified teaching staff who acted as a link with support for learning staff. In all colleges sampled, students had good information on support services through a range of facilities including 'one stop shops'. These arrangements were effective in reducing or eliminating stigmatisation. Across the colleges, support for learning staff met regularly to discuss resources, the use of ICT software, marketing of the service both internally and externally and best practice in learning and teaching across college programmes and subject areas. Students and staff highly commended the service. Staff made good use of these meetings to discuss feedback and evaluate the effectiveness of its support

All colleges reported concern at the number of learners with dyslexia who had not been assessed prior to going to college. Initial assessment generally involved discussions with learners about their previous experience of learning, health and any relevant information or reports. When college staff suspected that learners had additional support needs, they arranged for an assessment to be carried out. All colleges had good access to equipment and technology to support learners both internally and through the BRITE Centre.<sup>24</sup>

If a learner wished to apply for the Disabled Students Allowance and/or alternative assessment arrangements, relevant support staff provided evidence over and above any assessment made by college staff. Not all colleges paid for this assessment and some expressed concerns about delays in providing allowances to students on short courses. Colleges compensated by lending equipment and making recommendations to curriculum staff.

<sup>24</sup> The main aim of the BRITE Initiative (Beattie Resources for Inclusiveness in Technology and Education) is to encourage inclusive practice in learning and teaching in colleges by offering a wide range of resources including accredited professional training, themed seminars, online resources, assistive technology user guides and equipment loan.

### The range of support available for learners with dyslexia

Most colleges offered students individual support and help in small groups and/or in a class situation. Almost all students with dyslexia benefited from a wide range of ICT. Students also received alternative assessment arrangements where appropriate. Support for learning services provided students with readers, scribes and note-takers if necessary. In the best practices, they liaised with programme teams to keep them informed of progress and to request course information.

Other forms of support offered to students at colleges included:

- literacy, numeracy and profiling;
- arranging assessment by an educational psychologist;
- tuition in spelling for students with more complex difficulties;
- tuition in study skills appropriate to students with dyslexia, for example, recognition of what punctuation represents, visual note-taking, visual essay planning and time management;
- access to, and tuition in, specialised software text to speech, speech to text and mind mapping;
- an equipment-lending service for spellcheckers, dictaphones and laptops with software installed;
- adaptation of class notes and assessments;
- one-to-one feedback for students on their written work;
- a quiet area for working and studying;
- application to SQA and other accreditation bodies for special assessment arrangements;
- awareness sessions and self-help strategies;
- study skill and core skill workshops;
- technology assessments;
- training for lecturers related to differentiated teaching styles; and
- regular contact between learners and support services to review the support in place to ensure it is effective.

### Staff development and awareness of dyslexia

However, arrangements for subject staff to access continuing professional development on dyslexia varied. A variety of courses aimed at lecturers whose specific remit was support for learning was available. A few support for learning staff offered in-house awareness sessions on dyslexia throughout the year. In the best practice, all new members of staff received an induction session covering the support available for learners and staff. Staff were introduced to all the support systems in place and made aware of the technology available. The content of such sessions included raising awareness of:

- students' learning styles;
- technology;
- general awareness of dyslexia and effects on learning; and
- awareness of other specific learning difficulties which may co-occur with dyslexia.

In some colleges, staff had produced high quality learning and teaching materials that were inclusive and accessible. These included recommendations for appropriate font style, size and colour. These curriculum materials were adapted to suit individual needs and available in a variety of formats. Evaluation included the following key questions related to dyslexia to, assist the group to improve their ability to meet learners' needs.

- How accessible is the curriculum for learners with a range of impairments?
- How might the curriculum be made more accessible for learners with a range of impairments?
- What steps would need to be taken to implement the ways identified to enhance access to the curriculum?
- What barriers are there to achieving the changes identified and what can be done about them?
- How can the ways in which the curriculum is particularly accessible or inaccessible be made known to learners with a range of impairments?

Most lecturers in the sample of colleges visited, responded very positively to recommendations for inclusive learning and teaching strategies. The best practices offered awareness sessions to help staff feel more confident and better equipped to support learners within subject areas. In a small number of colleges, joint professional development sessions with university staff had taken place. A few colleges reported that they would benefit from joint training with schools.

**Key strengths**

- The impact of the BRITE Initiative in providing a range of appropriate resources and continuing professional development.
- Procedures for self-referral and identification of learning difficulties.
- The range of support available in colleges including ICT and assistive technology.
- Involvement of all staff in meeting learners' needs.
- Processes for self-evaluation of support services.

**Areas for development**

- Variations in funding, particularly in relation to assessment for dyslexia.
- Transition arrangements.



## 9. ISSUES ARISING FROM DISCUSSIONS WITH TEACHER EDUCATION UNIVERSITIES

University staff placed a strong emphasis on teaching students that as teachers they were responsible for the learning of all children and providing them with the skills to access appropriate information and support at all levels for all pupils with additional support needs. However, they expressed concern about the limited time in their courses to address specific issues such as dyslexia and additional support needs in general effectively. Preparation of teachers to meet the needs of such children appropriately was a continuous process which, in particular, could not be covered efficiently in a one-year course.

Almost all university staff were clear that teachers needed to know what dyslexia is, how to identify children, which strategies to use to support them and whom to turn to for specialist advice. Student teachers and newly qualified teachers also needed to be aware of the general responsibilities set out in the 'Standard for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland'<sup>25</sup> to employ strategies, set expectations and maintain a pace of work to make appropriate demands and meet the needs of all pupils. To help them to plan courses more effectively, universities had set up formal partnership committees to consult with local authorities, teachers and recent graduates.

### Perspectives on dyslexia

Staff indicated that faculties of education viewed dyslexia differently and not all faculties had an agreed view. Two located dyslexia within a diagnostic approach along with a group of other barriers to learning such as dyscalculia, dyspraxia, specific language impairment and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, but not Asperger's syndrome. Those universities which did not have an agreed view used a range of views. One regarded the British Psychological Service view as not specific enough while another faculty of education had recently adopted this view.

### Courses, including post graduate courses which featured dyslexia in teacher education universities

Courses related to dyslexia and additional support needs were usually delivered by support for learning specialists within education faculties. The role of these lecturers was to advise on appropriate programmes of study within courses by providing expertise related to additional support needs and inclusion. Co-ordination between additional support needs lecturers, and lecturers delivering programmes on primary and secondary education, resulted in cross-fertilisation of expertise between departments. These five universities regarded such practice as crucial in assisting student teachers to understand inclusive education. Most specialist lecturers were integrated to some degree within a faculty, usually education. Within the education faculty, students were taught about dyslexia and other additional support needs by the Support for Learning team.

Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) courses covered dyslexia within the context of teaching literacy and the difficulties which different groups of children experienced in learning to read. In these courses, dyslexia was usually addressed within a more general approach to inclusion, additional support for learning and effective learning and teaching.

Most specialist lecturers aimed to develop the skills of student teachers in supporting all additional support needs rather than focus on one particular area such as dyslexia. They did this through increasing the awareness of student teachers of how to access support within schools, identify online support and distance learning courses, collaborate with partner agencies and access training within local authorities. A group of universities had collaborated with each other and with voluntary agencies on developing well-received support material for schools including a DVD about transitions.

<sup>25</sup> 'The Standard for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland' GTC, 2006 is a statement for initial teacher education. It specifies what is expected of a student teacher at the end of initial teacher education, seeking provisional registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland. It is the first of a suite of standards which provide a framework for the professional development of teachers throughout their career.

Most university staff noted that limited dedicated teaching time could be given to literacy and additional support. B.Ed courses offered more opportunities for building incrementally on student knowledge. Time was more limited on one-year courses where students spent eighteen of the thirty-six weeks in schools. In one university, up to three days were devoted to literacy difficulties and dyslexia. However, the most common input in PGDE courses was a one-hour lecture, and beyond that an optional module and personal research.

Crowded teacher education courses also included content about children's rights, values, education, health and well-being and pastoral care. To provide additional experience, students were encouraged to look in depth at an individual case studies of pupils with additional support needs in their class through work on an assignment. However, this was optional, depending on whether the student had a particular interest in dyslexia. This was not regarded by lecturers as a practical means of providing students with the skills required to identify and meet learners' needs effectively in schools.

Most specialist lecturers identified the tension referred to earlier in this report in local authorities between identifying children with dyslexia and diagnosing and labelling children. Most were unsure of how to address this issue.

### **Staff views on what teachers need to know about dyslexia**

Most universities were in agreement about what teachers needed to know about dyslexia. This included:

- an awareness of possible co-occurrence of dyslexia with other additional support needs such as dyspraxia and specific language impairments;
- understanding that there is a continuum of dyslexia which has a differential impact on individuals;
- being able to recognise tell-tale signs such as decoding difficulties, poor memory and difficulty in understanding and processing information;
- knowing that dyslexia can affect self-esteem;
- an awareness among teachers that difficulties associated with dyslexia are not just about reading and literacy but also about structure, sequence and time;
- being aware that teachers will not find a single package of materials or strategies helpful for every pupil but must support each pupil in a way appropriate to them;
- being aware that children who have dyslexia and/or other disabilities respond in different ways to the term 'dyslexia';
- accepting that teachers have to adopt a positive approach to developing each child's abilities;
- knowing how and where to access information to help them support a pupil appropriately and to act on this information to improve outcomes for the pupil; and
- knowing how to use formative assessment approaches and be aware of different learning styles.

### **The impact of the qualifications and courses delivered by their university in schools**

None of the universities had undertaken extensive research about the impact of their courses and qualifications in schools and on young people's achievements, but staff felt that it was an important area for them to think about in terms of self-evaluation. Many lecturers consulted informally with alumni to obtain feedback on the usefulness of the university input on practice.

### **Improvements in teacher education**

University staff expressed a range of views on how they might support new and existing teachers to more effectively meet the needs of learners with additional support needs including dyslexia. They reiterated the difficulties in explaining dyslexia in any depth due to lack of time. Staff views about how the teacher education universities could develop their contribution to preparing teachers to meet the needs of pupils with dyslexia included the following.

- More time needed to be spent on teaching students about how to teach reading. This would



improve their skills in identifying individual pupils' difficulties and provide them with a greater range of intervention strategies.

- Continuing professional development beyond initial training was essential and currently did not meet the continuing needs of newly qualified teachers. Education authority training often did not build incrementally on skills but tended to consist of set lectures with limited impact on future learning and teaching.
- Key staff in universities should raise awareness and equip teachers with transferable skills to address the needs of pupils with a range of needs, including dyslexia. They should promote working with parents and community partners, including the voluntary sector. A few staff linked this with reservations about competencies models<sup>26</sup> or qualifications because they might encourage teachers to think about additional support needs in 'silos'.
- There should be greater emphasis on independent study and on how to access help and expertise from specialist professionals.

#### **Future changes to teacher education**

The ongoing issue of what to take out of busy post-graduate teacher education courses was a recurring feature of discussions. While pressure on PGDE courses was an issue, what student teachers learn in the schools where they spend approximately half of their course is dependent on the knowledge and skills of the teachers they work with when on school placement. Schools need to provide the necessary knowledge and skills in dealing with additional support needs and inclusive practices. Initial teacher education can only prepare teachers to enter the profession. However, schools and local authorities have a key role to play in providing teachers with appropriate, continuing professional development.

Staff in universities were keen to contribute to consistent, continuous professional development in schools to help practitioners develop enough specialist expertise to be of practical help to them in meeting learners' needs, and to work with education authorities to build incrementally on teachers' skills. The majority reported that support networks were needed for new teachers. Such networks could include a new role for chartered teachers in developing skills and abilities and passing on expertise within schools and key staff to deliver training in the use of ICT to meet pupils' additional support needs.

#### **Key strengths**

- Emphasis on meeting learners' needs as the responsibility of all teachers.
- Effective collaboration between some universities and with voluntary agencies to produce helpful support packages to assist schools in more effectively meeting the needs of children with dyslexia.

#### **Areas for development**

- The lack of consensus across universities about what dyslexia is.
- Prioritisation of time to effectively address dyslexia and additional support needs, particularly within Professional Graduate Diploma courses.
- Evaluation of the impact of university courses and qualifications on teachers' practice.

<sup>26</sup> Competencies models are accredited courses for which a teacher must demonstrate an acceptable, basic standard of skills and knowledge about particular additional support needs.

## 10. THE WAY AHEAD

Scottish education has much good and innovative practice in meeting the learning needs of children and young people with dyslexia. However, there remained considerable scope for development. The main areas identified for such development include: providing guidance on dyslexia and how to identify and meet learning needs alongside other learning needs; achieving greater consistency within and across authorities; improving awareness and expertise in pre-school; and improving services to young people and professional development for teachers in primary and secondary schools, including the use of resources such as ICT.

A mix of views as to what dyslexia actually is prevailed. The majority of authorities found the British Psychological Society's view helpful, but schools, colleges and universities held a range of perspectives. Such a mix of views can cause confusion for newly qualified and practising teachers. Teachers and learners should have updated, accessible and practical advice on dyslexia and its impact on young people including co-occurrence with other additional support needs. HMIE will work with Learning and Teaching Scotland, education authorities and Scottish government to produce examples of best practice in dealing with dyslexia.

Schools in authorities which had strategic approaches to meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia, knew what strategies to use to support children and young people. Some practice was innovative. However, few local authorities centralised information about how many children had dyslexia. Few had detailed information about the numbers of teachers with appropriate experience and specialist qualifications in meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia. Where such evidence was scarce, this hindered education authorities' capacity to deal with dyslexia strategically. There was also scope for authorities to develop their approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of services to meet the needs of learners with dyslexia. Such inconsistencies should be reduced and best practice shared.

Assessing children for dyslexia at the nursery stage was regarded as premature. Nevertheless, staff considered that all younger children, including those who displayed early indicators of language, motor, and sequential difficulties, were likely to benefit from early intervention to develop such skills. It is important that authorities ensure that staff at the pre-school stage have appropriate knowledge of early indicators of dyslexia and the kinds of early intervention approaches which may help to lessen the impact for vulnerable children in later years.

Parents and children identified considerable variation in provision for dyslexia support. Across primary and secondary schools, there was a need for more consistency in providing appropriate support. In this respect, appropriate professional development was vital. Teachers and lecturers with specialist qualifications showed a sound awareness of appropriate resources. However, there was considerable scope for all teachers to learn about the full range of ICT available to support children and encourage independence. Education authorities and universities should co-operate in providing relevant and effective continuing professional development in the range of ICT available.

## APPENDIX 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Dr Charles Weedon, Head of Learning Support, George Watson's College

## APPENDIX 2: REFERENCES AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

- Literature Review of Current Approaches to the Provision of Education for Children with Dyslexia, Dely L Elliott, Julia K Davidson and Jon Lewin, HM Inspectorate of Education, May 2007. Available on the HMIE website: [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk)
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- Supporting Children's Learning, Code of Practice, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh 2005
- The Standard for Initial Teacher Education in Scotland General Teaching Council, 2006
- How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence
- Part 1 Aiming for Excellence
- Part 2 Exploring Excellence, both HMIE, 2006
- Part 3 How good is our school?, HMIE 2007
- Part 4 Planning for Excellence, HMIE 2007
- Part 5 Journeys to Excellence website, launched 2007: [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk) or [www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk](http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk). Professional development materials, including movies, about the education of pupils with dyslexia to be added during 2008-2009
- British Dyslexia Association*, [www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)
- Dyslexia Scotland*, <http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/>
- Dyslexia South West*
- Dyslexia Highlands*
- Dyslexia Scotwest*
- The Arts Dyslexia Trust*
- Dyslexia Institute*
- National Listening Library*, email: [Info@listening-books.org.uk](mailto:Info@listening-books.org.uk)
- Dyslexic Adult Link, [www.Dyslexia-adults.com/](http://www.Dyslexia-adults.com/)
- Dyslexia Forum, [www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/dyslexia.html](http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/dyslexia.html)

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