

# Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy

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## Introduction

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

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

Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy clarifies the current use of the term *dyslexia* and the implications for assessment and support at a school level. The policy was compiled following a review of the research evidence into the nature of dyslexia and effective practice in identification and support of dyslexic pupils. The conclusions of the Working Party of the British Psychological Society (1999) *Dyslexia, Literacy and Psychological Assessment* are reflected in this policy.

Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy drew on the guidance from the Department for Education and Skills Research Report by Greg Brooks (2002) *What Works for CYP with Literacy Difficulties* which evaluated the effectiveness of interventions in schools. This work continued in Brooks (2007). The working party referred to this and other evidence on the effectiveness of specific programmes and classroom support.

Milton Keynes Dyslexia Policy forms part of the guidance from the Local Authority (LA) to assist schools in meeting the needs of CYP with special educational needs and disabilities, implementing the SEN Code of Practice (DFES 2001). It should be read in conjunction with the SEN Toolkit (DFES 2001) and Milton Keynes Special Educational Needs Handbook (available in schools).

Milton Keynes LA supports the view that SEN is a mainstream issue. Good practice for pupils with dyslexia will promote their full and independent inclusion in mainstream classes. Effective provision for pupils with dyslexia requires a whole school approach that is reflected in policies, classroom practice and support available to individual pupils. The LA assists schools in providing effective support through a rolling programme of workshops and training from the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Inclusion Service (SENDIS). This will complement other training in implementing national initiatives and will support Milton Keynes CYP and Young People's Plan. Nationally the Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) has been produced to provide support for schools in improving knowledge and practice for CYP with dyslexia.

## Definition

The following definition of dyslexia is used in Milton Keynes:

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

(British Psychological Society, 1999)

### Why we are using this definition

1. It is important to be absolutely clear about the definition to establish a shared understanding and clarity for professionals and parents.
2. In the past there has been much debate in education about using the term *dyslexia* due to the many concerns about labelling CYP. We recognise that CYP are individuals and that there are dangers in using the label as an explanation for continuing failure. We use the term with the understanding that everyone is different and it should not be an excuse for lack of progress.
3. We follow current research evidence, which suggests that dyslexia can occur in CYP of all abilities. Our definition does not rely on identifying a 'discrepancy' between ability in one area and attainments in other areas. However, recognising and utilising strengths is important in order to increase success and engagement with learning.

4. Dyslexia may co-exist with other barriers to learning. The existence of other difficulties should not preclude assessment for dyslexia or vice versa. We recognise the particular links there can be between dyslexia and the development of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in some CYP. We see overcoming the barriers to achievement presented by dyslexia as essential in securing CYP's social and emotional adjustment as well as in increasing their attainments.

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

5. Our definition focuses on observed difficulties rather than underlying causes, reflecting the continuing debate in the field of dyslexia and the absence of an agreement of a single unitary causal explanation. We believe this should not restrict or impede pupil's access to constructive help.
6. Research evidence does not suggest a particular profile of cognitive abilities necessary to define dyslexia. However, we acknowledge the evidence suggesting the central role of phonological processing in successful reading and spelling. There is also research suggesting the difficulties in verbal memory and verbal processing speed (Rose, 2009).

#### What the research shows about word reading and spelling

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

#### Assessment and identification

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

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

#### The role of schools and support services in assessment

1. In view of the number of CYP who are affected by dyslexia, we believe that the skills necessary to identify pupils with dyslexia should be available within schools. 'Diagnosis' by specialists who do not have access to information about the learning context and progress over time can only give partial information.
2. Teachers can identify dyslexia through their delivery of the curriculum. They can use relevant information, for example from National Curriculum Assessments of reading and writing. Staff in Milton Keynes schools have received training in the assessment and teaching of reading and spelling. However, it is recognised nationally that many schools see dyslexia as something separate and many teachers do not feel confident in identifying dyslexia. The DfE has responded by producing the IDP materials for staff development.
3. Educational psychologists and SENDIS advisory teachers are able to support schools in training and in advising on support for individual pupils. They can work with the school staff (not necessarily directly with the pupil) to achieve a better understanding of the factors that may be helping or hindering progress, and to identify ways forward.
4. It is important to establish that appropriate learning opportunities are available. Staff need to consider and adjust features of the physical and emotional learning context, such as feedback to pupils, teaching materials, classroom expectations and motivational strategies. Materials from the IDP can be used to support staff development in delivery of 'wave 1' quality first teaching. Further advice in modifying the curriculum and environment can be sought from the support services.
5. Assessment and support for pupils with dyslexia should be in line with the guidance in the Code of Practice for

Special Educational Needs and Milton Keynes Special Education Handbook, Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) and Assessment for Learning (AfL) will assist teachers in the process.

6. It is the expectation that schools will have implemented strategies from the IDP programme prior to involving outside agency support.

#### Meeting the needs of CYP with dyslexia

1. The definition of dyslexia indicates that word reading and/or spelling has been learnt incompletely after targeted support. We consider that for practical purposes a pupil would normally be at least at School Action for further investigation to be warranted. Those CYP considered to have dyslexia would normally be expected to have accessed additional support from the school's delegated budget for SEN and have levels of attainment that are significantly low.
2. The identification of dyslexia remains a separate issue from that of LA funding - no label brings automatic additional resources, including dyslexia. It is the severity of need following intervention at School Action and School Action Plus that determines whether or not the LA provides additional support.
3. The LA provides services to assist schools in supporting CYP with special educational needs, including dyslexia. SENDIS advisory teachers are able to support schools to develop interventions and advise on suitable resources. The Educational Psychology Service can support schools in meeting the needs of CYP with more complex difficulties.
4. Milton Keynes LA will support schools in identifying and supporting CYP with dyslexia at three levels:
  - Promoting good practice in establishing dyslexia friendly schools including whole school policy development and classroom approaches.
  - Developing specialist skills in identifying literacy difficulties and deciding on appropriate interventions for use with individuals and groups. Training to deliver specific intervention programmes may be requested.
  - Promoting further professional development opportunities for teachers at a specialist level in supporting pupils with dyslexia, including recognised qualifications.

## Frequently asked questions

### 1. *Is anyone who has reading difficulties dyslexic?*

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

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

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

There is some evidence that frequent short teaching sessions are more effective than one long session with daily input being the most effective. Breaking reading and spelling objectives down into smaller steps is essential. Multi-sensory teaching together with over-learning is highly recommended.

Schools are able to seek the advice from Milton Keynes support services, including SENDIS and the Educational Psychology Service in supporting CYP with difficulties.

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

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

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

Research into this area will continue to be interesting. However, placing dyslexia in an educational context puts the focus on the teaching and wider educational environment. Certainly it is here that there is the

greatest potential for positive change whatever the genetic make up.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The definition provides the basis for support at different levels. At the early stages when the CYP is not making progress changes may involve some minor adjustments to the wave 1 quality first teaching provided for the whole class. It may be necessary for teachers to personalise learning by differentiating the curriculum for some pupils. This would include breaking down learning into smaller steps delivered at a slower pace with more repetition, possibly supported by a teaching assistant under the class teacher's guidance. This should be incorporated into teachers' planning. If progress remains unsatisfactory, the CYP should be offered more intensive support and extra help would become increasingly 'specialist' and adjusted in accordance with the child's response.

Research and guidance about effective interventions, such as the DCSF guidance (Brooks, 2007 and Rose, 2009), should inform practice and will continue to be important for teaching and learning. The evaluation of outcomes from Every Child a Reader (ECAR) will also contribute to schools' knowledge about literacy interventions.

## Intervention and Support

Support for pupils with dyslexia should be consistent with the school curriculum.

Effective literacy provision has been described in terms of three 'waves' of intervention (DFES 2003).

• **Wave 1**

The effective inclusion of all CYP in a daily high quality literacy teaching

• **Wave 2**

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

• **Wave 3**

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

### 1. Wave 1 support

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

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

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

### 2. Wave 2 support

For some CYP who are at risk of underachievement, the DfE has provided a range of structured small group interventions, designed to boost achievement in literacy. These include ELS in year 1, Sir Kitt's Quest in year 3 and ELS in year 5. Other support, such as booster classes and one to one teaching, have also been provided to maximise progress in key year groups.

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

### 3. Wave 3 support

The DfE guidance on Wave 3 support includes a list of interventions which are backed by research evidence (Brooks, 2007).

#### • School Action

CYP with more significant difficulties as assessed by the Foundation Profile, P levels and National Curriculum levels may meet the criteria for support at School Action. Teaching staff would carry out more detailed diagnostic assessment and set up an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Group Education Plan (GEP). Increasingly schools are using individual Provision Plans instead of IEPs. Appropriate targets to increase progress would be set. Advice could be sought from SENDS advisory teachers. Support at this level would include additional differentiated learning experiences, including specific interventions. ICT together with

specialised resources might be used to support CYP at School Action.

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

#### • School Action Plus

Pupils who meet the thresholds for School Action Plus would require more in depth assessment in the areas of reading and spelling, including careful analysis of errors and learning styles. The advice from external support services should be sought in assessing and monitoring progress through the child's IEP. Appropriate ICT resources should be made available.

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

#### • Pupils with Statements of SEN

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

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

#### Examinations

Pupils with dyslexia undertaking Key Stage 2 SATs or GCSE examinations may need assessment for examination authorities in order that appropriate arrangements may be made. This needs to be provided by a suitably qualified practitioner. Guidance is available for schools.

## References

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- Rose, J. (2010) *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Other literacy Difficulties*, independent report commissioned for the Secretary of State.  
<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/00659-2009DOM-EN.pdf>

## Guidance for special arrangements for tests and examinations

- Assessment and Reporting Arrangements Key Stage 2, Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency.  
<http://www.qcda.gov.uk/26.aspx>
- Access Arrangements and Special Considerations for General and Vocational Qualifications, Joint Council for Qualifications.  
<http://www.jcq.org.uk/homepage.cfm>