Kent's Approach to Supporting Children and Young People Experiencing Difficulties with Literacy Development (including guidance on the use of the term Dyslexia).

Authors: This document has been developed by Kent Educational Psychology Service with the Specialist Teaching and Learning Service in collaboration with Kent schools and parents/carers.

Review: This document will be reviewed on an annual basis taking account of any developments relating to this area. *Date for review: 1 June 2025*

Executive Summary

Kent is committed to promoting high standards of literacy for all children and young people. In Kent we feel it is important to address the needs of all children and young people experiencing difficulties with literacy development, irrespective of a label or formal identification. This is because there is considerable evidence that poor literacy skills can significantly impact a person's life chances and outcomes in relation to poverty, employment, self-esteem and offending behaviour[1].

It is important that needs are identified early and timely intervention support and strategies are given within the graduated approach, in line with national policy and guidance for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Schools have a duty to engage their best endeavours to meet the special educational needs of children with barriers to learning through reasonable adjustments and the provision of suitable education, under the Children and Families Act (2014).

The following principles are applied:

- High quality teaching, delivered through Quality First Teaching, adapted for individual pupils, is the first step in responding to pupils who have or may have special educational needs.
- Teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress and development of all pupils in their class, including those with special educational needs.
- In deciding whether and/or what special education provision should be in place for a child, teachers should consider all information about a child's

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[1] Bennett, K. (2008) 'Could do better': improving literacy in schools. In Singleton C. [Ed] *The Dyslexia Handbook 2008/9.* The British Dyslexia Association.

learning gained through assessment and listening to the child and their parent/carers.

- It is expected that all schools will give the appropriate and timely help that individuals need to make progress in literacy throughout each Key Stage.

- All children and young people experiencing difficulties with their literacy development have fair access to the available resources and opportunities to make progress.

Difficulties with literacy skills development, including dyslexia, are understood and set out in this document within the broader context of literacy teaching. This document provides guidance for practitioners based on evidence-informed standards and expectations for the inclusive support of children experiencing difficulties with their literacy development in Kent schools. It follows the objectives in the Department of Education's (2023) Reading Framework and is positioned alongside the following county documents:

Kent Mainstream Core Standards https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs/inclusion/the-mainstream-core-standards

Countywide Approach to Inclusive Education https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs/inclusion/countywide-approach-to-inclusive-education *(to be updated with 2023 version when published)*

Kent County Council Special Educational Needs Inclusion Statement https://www.kelsi.org.uk/special-education-needs/inclusion/inclusion-statement

the SEND Information Hub https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/special-educational-needs/types-of-send/specific-learning-difficulties

Evidence suggests that as much as one-fifth of children may have continued delays or difficulties in the development of reading and/or spelling skills. These needs are predictable within the education system. They are acknowledged to have significant impact on the educational and life experience of children and young people. The means to remedy these difficulties are educational in nature. All difficulties with literacy development experienced by children in Kent are considered to be an issue for mainstream settings.

Contents

How Children Learn to Read – Development of Literacy Skills

Language is the foundation of literacy development. If a child has language needs or has had less experience of language, they will be approaching literacy from a lower starting point. For these children it is essential that there is a dual approach where literacy and language needs are addressed alongside each other (See the Simple View of Reading model – Appendix A).

Children usually begin to read with a whole word awareness of visual and spoken words. They start to recognise shapes, letters and words that have meaning for them, such as the first letters of their name, words like Mum or Dad, logos of things that interest them[2].

Being able to hear and identify different sounds in words (Phonological awareness) is a key skill and strong predictor of later reading success (although problems in this area cannot account for all those with a reading difficulty). Phonological awareness is used to work out the relationship between different parts of words and what they sound like. Language development, including vocabulary knowledge, is important for the development of decoding and reading comprehension skills[3] [4] [5]. All talk is useful but certain types of talk about books have been found to bring particular advantages. Book-related talk introduces more language than children may hear in conversation. Book-related talk also prepares children to become more committed and enthusiastic readers.

Children are more likely to continue to be readers in homes where books and reading are valued representing a protective factor against later reading development difficulties[6]. Reading material can be sourced inexpensively or free of charge from second hand book shops and the local library service.

[2] Frith, U. (1985). Beneath the surface of developmental dyslexia. *Surface dyslexia*, *32*, 301-330

[3] Nation, K. & Snowling, M. (2004). Beyond Phonological Skills: Broader Language Skills Contribute to the Development of Reading. *Journal of Research in Reading,* 27(4), 342-356

[4] Hulme, C. Snowling, M. Caravolas, M. & Carrol, J. (2005). Phonological skills are (probably) one cause of success in learning to read: A comment on Castles and Coltheart. *Scientific Studies of Reading,* 9(4), 351-365

[5]Tunmer, W.E. & Chapman, J.W. (2011). *Does Set for Variability Mediate the Influence of Vocabulary Knowledge on the Development of Word Recognition Skills?* Scientific Studies of Reading, 16(2), 122-140.

[6] Clark, C. & Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for pleasure: A research overview.* London: National Literacy Trust.

There are a number of online providers who offer access to e-books free of charge.

Early Learning Goals are set out in the Early Years Foundation Statutory Framework[7] . Pre-school education should focus on developing the following skills to provide a foundation for learning to read, attention and listening skills:

- A wide vocabulary through conversation and speech directed to the child
- An interest in books and written material
- Awareness of print
- Awareness of the sounds that make up words (phonological awareness), such as through games like 'I Spy', rhymes and songs, syllable clapping

Historical Context and Methods of Teaching Reading

Learning to read is not an evolutionary skill like speaking or walking. Reading does not occur naturally and has to be taught. It therefore follows that learning to read is directly related to how reading is taught. Various methods for teaching reading have been used over the years. Before 1998, whole-word approaches and whole-language approaches tended to be the main way reading was taught. Between 1998 and 2006, phonics was taught in schools, but little work had been done to ascertain what elements of phonics programmes made them successful and how they compared with other methods of teaching reading. A review enquiry by Jim Rose (known as 'The Rose Report') in 2006[8] established that, although some of the research was uncertain, the evidence pointed towards structured, systematic, synthetic phonics programmes (SSSP) as offering the best opportunity for reading skills to be established. DfE statistics suggest that standards in literacy have improved since the introduction of SSSP following the 2006 Rose Report.

In 2021 the Department of Education introduced the Reading Framework (updated 2023)[9]. As a result it is now recommended that mainstream schools use SSSP's to teach children in Reception and Key Stage 1 to read and write and have provided a list of phonics programmes that have been validated for use. The Reading Framework and associated publication *'Now the whole school is reading': supporting struggling readers in secondary school*[10] promotes the continued importance of formal systematic, synthetic phonics teaching for older pupils who have not yet learnt the phonic code and are at risk of failing to learn to read. In addition, the Early

[7] Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[8] Rose, J. (2006). *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading.* Department for Education and Skills. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/5551/2/report.pdf [accessed 13/06/23]

[9] The reading framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[10] 'Now the whole school is reading': supporting struggling readers in secondary school - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Career Framework published in 2019[11] sets out the expectation for all newly qualified teachers that they have a clear understanding of systematic, synthetic phonics, particularly (but not exclusively) if teaching early reading and spelling. This means that all newly qualified teachers should understand how to break down the phonic code for struggling readers.

Why Is This Important?

There has been a high degree of focus from subsequent governments since the early 2000s on literacy standards, resulting in raised expectations of schools and the establishment of literacy hubs and evidence-based practice in mainstream schools. The SEND Code of Practice (published in 2015)[12] set out a framework for teachers and schools to use systematic approaches of assessment, planning, intervention and review when working with pupils experiencing difficulty with learning.

This means that the experience of children who are educated in mainstream schools today is likely to be different to those who were taught before the early 2000s. Formal progress checks, such as the Phonics Screening Check at the end of Year 1 and 2, gives important information to both schools and parents/carers about how the child is progressing and allows them to take early action to prevent later difficulties. Government guidelines and expectations that pupil's reading ability continues to be monitored through secondary school means that appropriate support and interventions should continue to be offered within mainstream schools as part of their usual provision.

Spelling development is closely aligned to the developing knowledge of how letter sounds (phonemes) are linked to letter shapes (graphemes), with reading ability usually preceding spelling ability. Spelling development passes through a number of stages. It starts with mark-making that becomes more intentional and through this children start to show an understanding of the difference between drawing and symbolic mark-making. Then children learn to match letter sounds with written letters and start to imitate those letters in their symbolic mark-making.

As they develop further, children often start writing consonant sounds as these are more phonetically predictable than vowel sounds. The phonetic stage of spelling development is when the child's letter-sound correspondence really starts to take off. Often consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words are easier to learn and write first. Spelling continues to be phonetic and so spelling errors for phonetically irregular words are common at this stage. With increased exposure to words through reading

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[11] Early Career Framework (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[12] SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25 [accessed 13/06/23]

and spelling practice, the child has increased success with memorising words that cannot be sounded out.

The progression to composing sentences and longer pieces of writing draws on more sophisticated higher-order learning skills and requires a degree of self-regulation. These include planning what to write, reviewing and re-drafting as well as being able to read, form the letters and spell the words.

Moving from a 'learning reader' to a 'reader learning'

The end goal of phonics teaching is to move from a state of 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'. Skilled reading is a complex process and it is not surprising that there is a great deal of variation in the rate of children's reading development.

If there are significant difficulties or delays in the process of learning to read this has the potential to have a negative and far-reaching impact on wider learning development. The better a child can read the more likely they are to practice reading, which makes them more likely to read more and so on (the so-called 'Matthew effect' of cumulative advantage[13]). Conversely, a child struggling in the early stages is likely to be less motivated to want to look at books or practice reading skills, slowing their progress, making it even less likely they will want to read.

Difficulties with the mechanics of reading, spelling and writing in the early stages can quickly escalate into a range of other negative associations with learning, and the earlier interventions are put in place the more effective they can be. For this reason, it is vital that any difficulties with acquiring literacy skills are identified quickly and a rapid response using effective intervention is put in place as soon as those difficulties are identified.

Within this model we recognise that the most important questions are:

1. **What is the nature of the literacy difficulty?**
2. **What are the most suitable interventions to support an individual's particular needs relating to reading, spelling and some wider areas of literacy?**
3. **What is the expected impact of the intervention and what is hoped to be achieved?**

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[13] Stanovich, K. E. (1986). Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly, 21*(4), 360–407.

Monitoring Literacy Progress and Early Identification of Difficulties – Assessment

Schools closely monitor the development of literacy skills through the Early Years and Key Stage 1. Schools are expected to regularly monitor the progress of all learners through cycles of **'Assess, Plan, Do, Review' (**SEND Code of Practice 2015, Figure 1.).
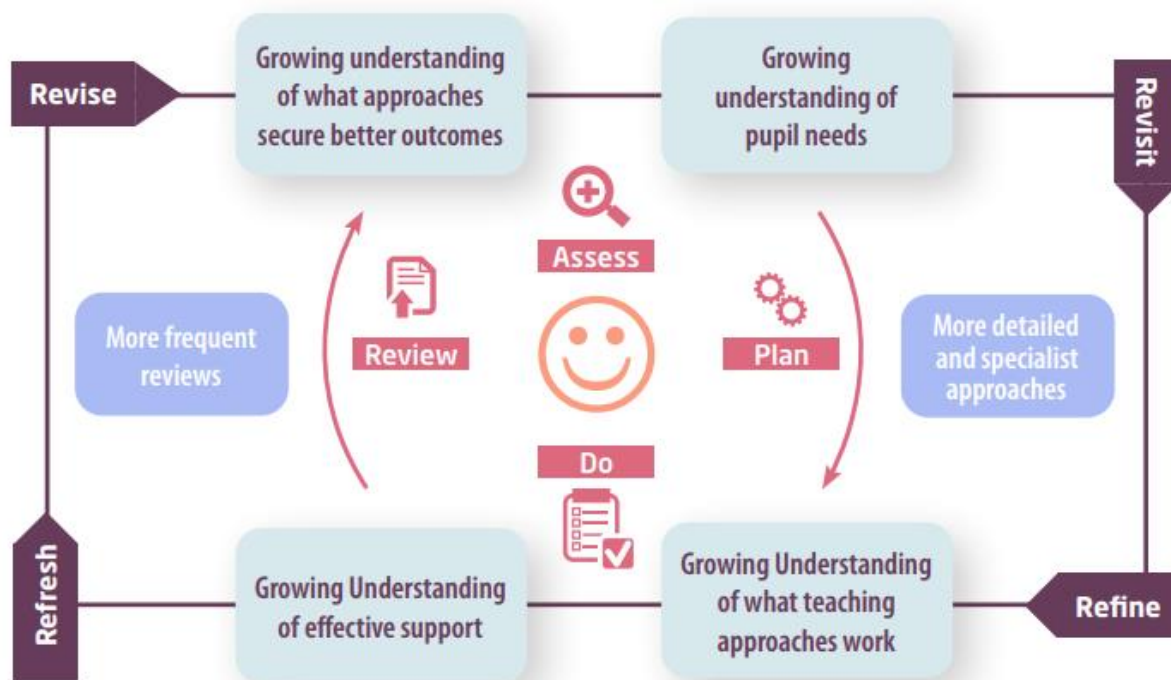
Figure 1. Assess, Plan, Do, Review Cycle - Kent Mainstream Core Standards p.17

Accurate assessment is vital to ensure that the skills being taught match the curriculum content and skills a pupil has already mastered. Assessment over time, and monitoring pupils' response to teaching, is accepted as the most effective way of identifying literacy difficulties or those at risk of literacy difficulties, as well as informing early intervention and rate of progress[14].

When a child or young person is making less than expected progress with their literacy skills, teachers are best placed to complete accurate school-based assessments to identify specific areas of literacy that need improving and

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[14] Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S., & Vaughn, S. (2008) *Response to Intervention: A Framework for Reading Educators.* International Reading Association.

inform appropriate interventions.   This **Graduated Approach** refers to the process of putting more support in place in response to a growing understanding of what is needed through these cycles.

There is no single assessment to identify literacy difficulties and schools should use a range of methods to explore the nature of the CYP's literacy difficulties to include:

- Phonological Awareness and Phonic Skills
- Reading fluency and reading accuracy
- Comprehension
- Spelling
- Writing

Schools should also consider assessment of other underpinning factors that may create barriers to literacy development:

- Working memory
- Processing Speed
- Attention and focus

Co-occurring difficulties

A range of other factors may be seen that contribute to difficulties in acquiring literacy skills (Figure 2.). These should be considered alongside the strengths and abilities of the individual. This will always give a unique profile with each potentially playing a part in the development of literacy skills.
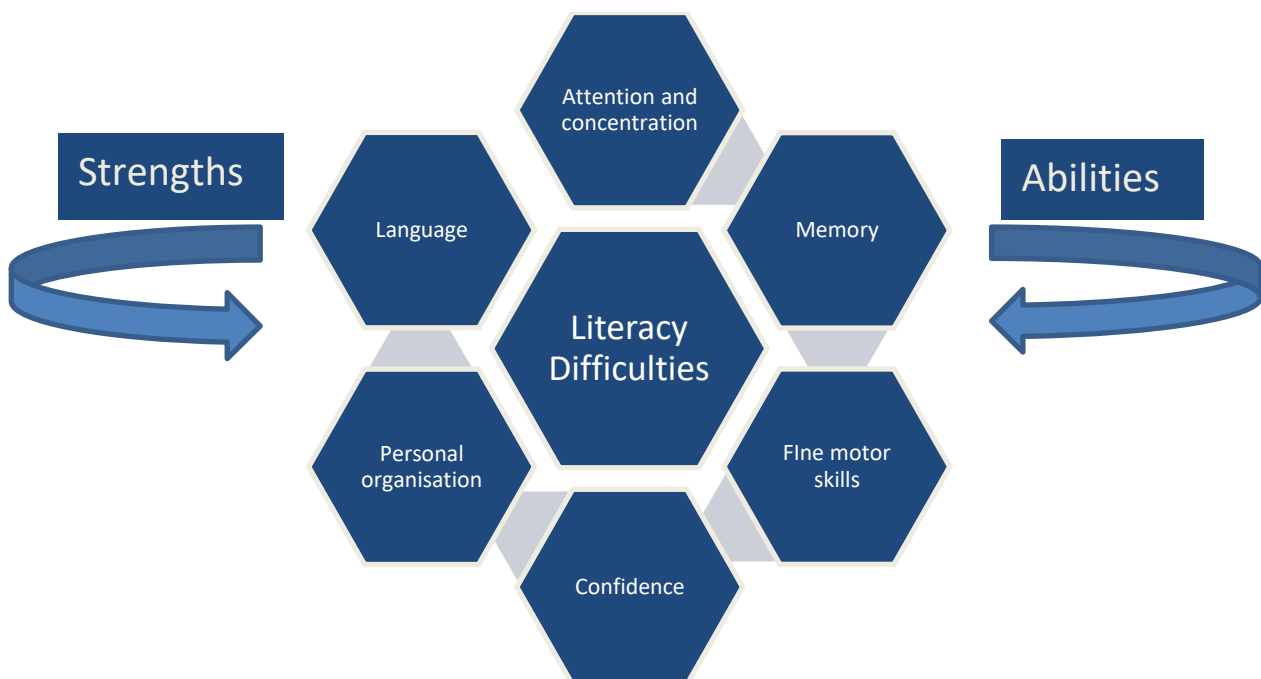

Figure 2. Co-occurring difficulties

A holistic assessment and understanding of the neurodiverse strengths and difficulties of the pupil takes account of these and seeks to determine the degree to which the difficulty is contributing to literacy development. Interventions to address the difficulties identified, or strategies to reduce the impact should be included as part of the plan (see later section). It is important to understand that while each of these may present a barrier to literacy development, addressing them in themselves will not be sufficient to improve the literacy difficulties.

Please see this short video from the British Dyslexia Association as a useful resource to share with children and young people about how they can positively understand their dyslexia https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11r7CFlK2sc .

Assessment by the class teacher, along with the SENCo, should be used over time, to monitor the impact of interventions and to inform future planning based on analysis of what has worked and identifying and addressing any continuing barriers to literacy learning. Currently, further support and guidance on the use of assessments is currently available via Locality Resources[15], and in the future will be available via school-led Dyslexia Hubs.

Addressing Literacy Difficulties – Skill development and Intervention

Effective intervention planning will flow from accurate assessment that has been used to identify the presenting difficulties to allow for targeted approaches. This assessment can include standardised assessment, screeners, phonic checks, and classroom-based assessment and should lead to greater understanding of the nature of the child's difficulties. When planning any support, the emotional well-being and confidence of the pupil should be prioritised, with all adults having a clear understanding of the pupil's needs. Competence beliefs and attitudes to reading and writing have been found to correlate with achievement and attainment[16] [17].

High quality targeted and evidence-based interventions should be available to all those who need them and should follow the graduated approach (Figure 4.).

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[15] Locality Resources refers to the professional expertise that lies outside of schools as part of the Local Authorities offer of support to schools. At the time of publishing this included Local Inclusion Forum Team Meetings, training and 'surgery clinics' offered by cognition and learning specialist teachers, Speech and Language Therapy access via the Balanced System, and locally directed resources from the Educational Psychology team.

[16] Petscher, Y. (2010). A meta-analysis of the relationship between student attitudes towards reading and achievement in reading. *Journal of Research in Reading,* 33(4), 335-355.

[17] Pajares, F. (2003). Self-efficacy beliefs, motivation and achievement in writing: A review of the literature. *Reading and writing quarterly*, 19, 139-158.

Schools can seek advice about the support for individual children at Kent Local Inclusion Forum Team (LIFT) meetings. The approach adopted in these meetings is one of solution-focussed case discussions drawing on the knowledge and skills of other schools in the Locality; EPs and specialist teachers or other practitioners. These Locality Resources can support schools to adapt interventions for children and young people who are not making progress despite evidence-based intervention. Every district in Kent offers drop-in 'clinics' for case discussions.

Detailed guidance on interventions and/or curriculum adaptation is beyond the scope of this document. Several reviews of the effectiveness of intervention schemes have been recently published and links to these are provided below:

https://interventionsforliteracy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/What-Works-for-Literacy-Difficulties-6th-Edition-2020.pdf

Projects | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

Schools are advised to use this information to select appropriate evidence-based interventions to meet the needs identified for a child. Further support for schools to identify appropriate interventions can be accessed via the Locality Resource offer. There is strong evidence that precision teaching (a measurement system with four steps: pinpoint, record, change, try again) is an effective approach for building accuracy and fluency in reading skills[18].

As with reading, a number of additional skills, such as fine motor control, hand to eye integration, visual memory, attention and motivation, are required of the child which need to be co-ordinated for this development to take place. Children who have weaknesses with these skills may present with delays or difficulties with their spelling and writing development.

Schemes for pupils who struggle with spelling, work best when highly structured, targeted and individualised, linked to phonics instruction and vocabulary building. Effective writing support includes opportunities for developing self-regulation processes and other aids to separate out the different components of the writing process (see Metacognition section below).

Schools are advised to consider and manage the implementation of the intervention, ensuring it is delivered with fidelity to the programme. Please see Appendix B for further information.

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[18] Gist, C. & Bulla, A.J. (2022). A Systematic Review of Frequency Building and Precision Teaching with School-Aged Children. *Journal of Behavioural Education*, 31, 43-68
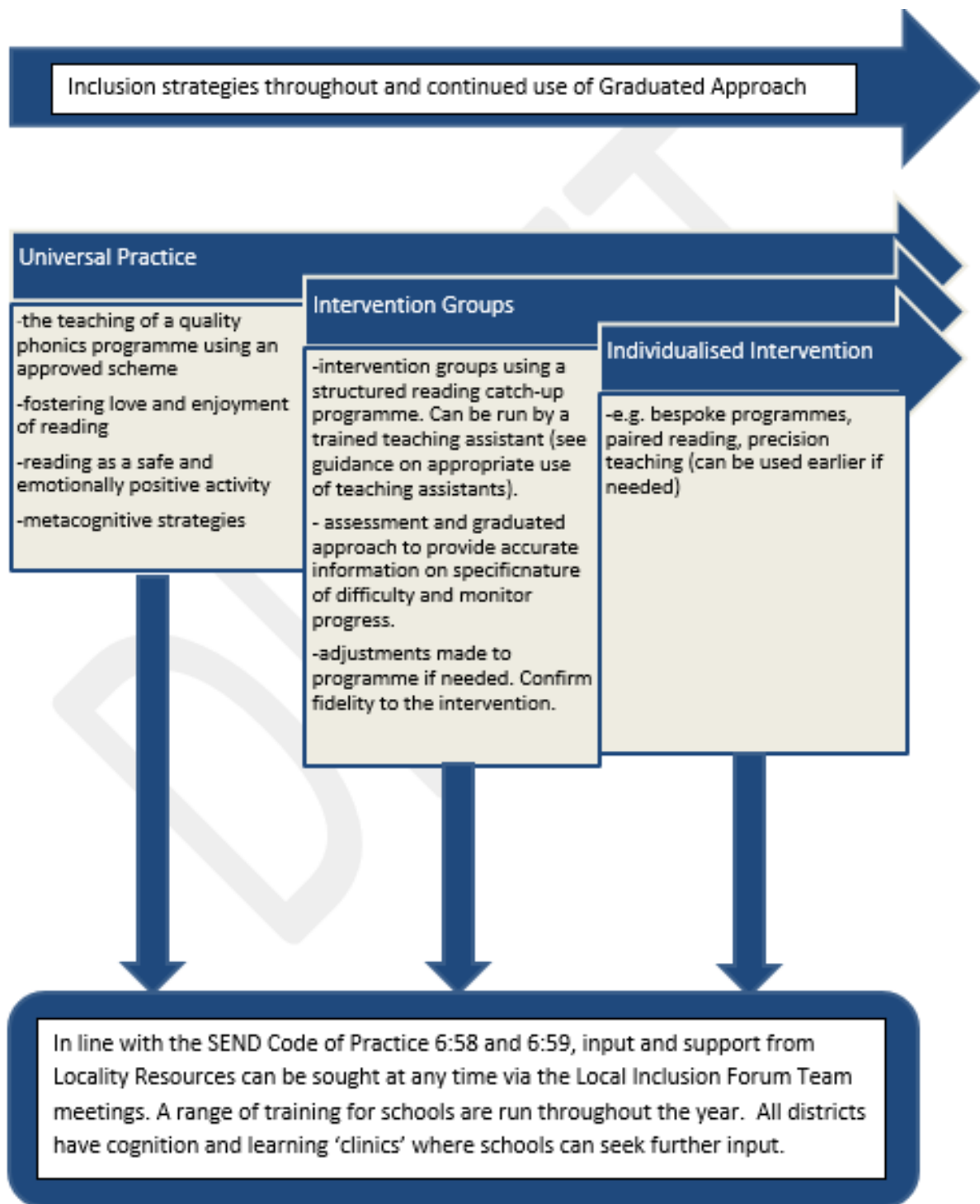
Inclusion strategies throughout and continued use of Graduated Approach

Universal Practice

-the teaching of a quality phonics programme using an approved scheme

-fostering love and enjoyment of reading

-reading as a safe and emotionally positive activity

-metacognitive strategies

Intervention Groups

-intervention groups using a structured reading catch-up programme. Can be run by a trained teaching assistant (see guidance on appropriate use of teaching assistants).

- assessment and graduated approach to provide accurate information on specificnature of difficulty and monitor progress.

-adjustments made to programme if needed. Confirm fidelity to the intervention.

Individualised Intervention

-e.g. bespoke programmes, paired reading, precision teaching (can be used earlier if needed)

In line with the SEND Code of Practice 6:58 and 6:59, input and support from Locality Resources can be sought at any time via the Local Inclusion Forum Team meetings. A range of training for schools are run throughout the year. All districts have cognition and learning 'clinics' where schools can seek further input.

Figure 3. Graduated approach of intervention

Cognitive interventions, including memory training, and other complementary measures, such as targeting visual processing through the use of coloured lenses, have yet to demonstrate their effectiveness in improving reading. All pupils need a variety of multi-sensory teaching approaches and activities, and all pupils use their hearing, vision and touch when learning to read and write. Beyond this, research

does not support the use of any specific multi-sensory approaches per se to improve reading and writing[19] [20].

Reasonable adjustments expected by schools to reduce the impact of weak working memory and processing skills in learning are outlined in Kent's Mainstream Core Standards document and include (but are not limited to):

- Providing checklists and task boards
- Using visual supports and reminders
- Allowing extra processing time before a response is needed
- Giving clear and simple instructions, breaking down longer instructions and giving one at a time
- Providing printed notes
- Simple adaptations such as font, line spacing, coloured backgrounds/highlighters, lighting, reduce glare on interactive whiteboards by changing background colour to a neutral tone etc

Quality First Teaching

School staff should have an understanding of how literacy skills develop and how to support pupils at different stages of development. Phonological awareness may need to continue to develop beyond Foundation Stage for many children with difficulties acquiring literacy skills.

Teaching that is well-structured is understood to be more effective than other factors such as ability grouping, class size, individualised teaching and spending more money[21]. Research shows that teaching is most effective when it includes the following:

- A structured approach, teaching one new skill at a time[22]
- Teach more frequently occurring skills before less useful skills e.g. teaching the first 100 most common words (which account for a high proportion of written English) before teaching less common words.

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[19] Pennington, B. F. (2011). Controversial therapies for dyslexia. *Perspectives on language and literacy: a quarterly publication of the International Dyslexia Association*, *37*.

[20] Henderson, L. M., Tsogka, N., & Snowling, M. J. (2013). Questioning the benefits that coloured overlays can have for reading in students with and without dyslexia. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *13*(1), 57-65.

[21] Hattie, J. (2009) *Visible Learning*. London: Routledge

[22] Solity, J.S. (2008). The Learning Revolution.

Systematic approaches in phonics teaching are also based on this principle[23]

- Distributed practice of identified skills i.e. Daily 5-minute sessions are better than a single 25-minute weekly session[24]
- Teaching of skills to fluency as well as accuracy[25]
- Teaching of skills to generalisation in order to apply learning in different contexts[26] [27] [28]
- Mix teaching of old and new skills together[29] [30] [31] [32]
- Inform the child of the purpose of the intervention, their achievement and rate of progress[33]

At all stages of education there should be a focus on inclusion, i.e. removing barriers that delayed literacy skills may have in enabling a child or young person to fully access all learning and curriculum content.

[23] Carnine, D.W., Silbert, J. and Kameenui, E.J. (1997) *Direct Instruction Reading.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

[24] Moreira, B.F.T., Pinto, T.S.S., Starling, D.S.V. & Jaeger, A. (2019). Retrieval Practice in Classroom Settings: A Review of Applied Research. *Frontiers in Education.* 4, 1-16.

[25] Haring, N.G. & Eaton, M.D. (1978). Systematic instructional procedures: An instructional hierarchy*.* In N.G. Haring (ed), *The Fourth R: Research in the classroom (p23-40).* Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill.

[26] Solity, J.S. (2015). The rhetoric and reality of evidence-based practice and teaching reading: How to bridge the curriculum gap. *Occasional paper 141. Centre for Strategic Education.*

[27] Adelman, J.S., Gordon D.A. Brown, GDA., & Quesada, J.F. (2006). Contextual Diversity, Not Word Frequency, Determines Word-Naming and Lexical Decision Times, *Psychological Science.* 17, 9, 814-823.

[28] Nation, K. (2017). Nurturing a lexical legacy: reading experience is critical for the development of word reading skill, *Science of Learning*, 3, 1-4.

[29] Rohrer, D. & Pashler, H. (2017). Recent Research on Human Learning Challenges Conventional Instructional Strategies, *Educational Researcher*, 39, 5, 406-412.

[30] Brown, G.D. (1998) Word recognition in Beginning Literacy Instruction: The ROAR model, in J.L. Metsala & L.C. Ehri (Eds.), *Word Recognition in Beginning Literacy. Mahwah, NJ: LEA.*

[31] Baddeley, A., Eysenck, M. & Anderson, M. (2020). *Memory.* London: Routledge.

[32] Solity, J.S. (2008). The Learning Revolution.

[33] Nation, K. (2017). Nurturing a lexical legacy: reading experience is critical for the development of word reading skill, *Science of Learning*, 3, 1-4.

Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning

Metacognition refers to strategies and approaches that encourage thinking about one's own learning. When used well, 7+ additional months of progress have been reported, representing high impact particularly for disadvantaged pupils[34]. Metacognitive strategies should be taught in conjunction with specific subject content to enable pupils to apply these strategies to specific tasks. The Education and Endowment Foundation (EEF) Metacognition Toolkit provides schools with guidance, recommendations and resources to implement at the whole school level to improve outcomes for all pupils Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk).

Severe and Persistent Literacy Difficulties (also known as Dyslexia)

Some children have persistent difficulties with their literacy development from the early stages of their education, despite high quality literacy teaching and parents providing the best opportunities for conversation and access to reading material. Some children have neuro-developmental differences and/or special educational needs that make learning to read and write[35] a challenge.

Even if the child has established reading skills, persistent difficulties with spelling and writing can continue to exist. This is likely to be related to difficulties hearing and processing the smallest units of sounds in words.

A number of additional skills, such as fine motor control, hand to eye integration, visual memory, good processing speed and attention and motivation, are also required of the child when learning to read and write. These skills needs to be co-ordinated for spelling and writing development to take place.

When children are assessed as having persistent difficulties in these aspects of their literacy development this can be described as, 'Dyslexia'.

Kent has adopted a widely accepted definition of dyslexia from the British Psychological Society (1999, reprinted in 2005) which focusses on observable learning difficulties:

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[34] Education Endowment Foundation (2021). Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk) [accessed 10/01/24]

[35] Rose, J. (2009). *Identifying and teaching children and young people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties. (The Rose Report.)* Nottingham, UK: DCSF Publications. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/14790/7/00659-2009DOM-EN_Redacted.pdf [accessed 13/06/23]

>**"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"**

Kent County Council also acknowledges the findings from the update to the Rose Report (2009), which is the current definition adopted by the British Dyslexia Association:

>**"Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling."**

>**Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed**

>**Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities**

>**It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points**

>**Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia**

>**A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexia difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention**

Although these definitions and descriptions are recognised across many local authorities and professionals, research in the field of dyslexia lacks consensus leading to the term being used in various and sometimes contradictory ways[36]. It can be an emotive and often contested issue[37]. Defining dyslexia and laying out criteria for its identification is an ongoing task of critical enquiry[38] *.

At the time of publishing, work by the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) were seeking to achieve agreement on dyslexia through the Delphi method. They highlight processing difficulties

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[36] Elliott, J.G. & Grigorenko, E.L. (2014). *The Dyslexia Debate.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

[37] Van Daal, V. (2015). Commentary on 'The Dyslexia Debate: Actions, reactions and over-reactions by J.Elliott. *The Psychology of Education Review, 39 (1)* pp 22-25

[38] Hayes, B. & Frederickson, N. (2023) Can we Cure Dyslexia? In *Educational Psychology 3rd Edition*, pp110-127. Routledge.

and a key role for fluency and the importance of holistic identification of needs. The outcome of this work will be incorporated in the next annual review of this document.

There are individuals who have reported that a formal diagnosis of dyslexia has been a positive experience to give clarity and explanation for the difficulties they experience. Research in this area reveals mixed findings and it is important to take this into account. While some report improved positive self-perceptions following formal identification of dyslexia or a dyslexia diagnosis[39], others have indicated that there is greater risk of individuals developing negative self-perceptions[40], disempower teachers and parents who may feel they cannot help[41] or lower expectations for academic outcomes[42].

Kent recognises that, for those children and young people who find learning to read, spell and write far more challenging than others, this can be worrying and lead to anxiety for them and their families. We have heard from Kent parents, what is important to them is that their children's needs are well understood and recognised by their school and that appropriate support and provision is put in place to help them succeed.

'Dyslexia' can be used as a term to describe difficulties with reading or spelling identified as 'severe and persistent' (see Box 1.) in line with the BPS definition. Within this group will be a spectrum of learners, from those who have the potential to progress well in other areas of learning (who may be described as having a specific literacy difficulty) to those with much wider and more complex needs, who present with challenges that are preventing them from acquiring literacy skills.

It is acknowledged that there are different preferences about the use of terminology. When working with children, young people and their families or carers seek guidance from them to clarify the language the individual would prefer to use. The term 'Dyslexia' can be used where all parties have a shared understanding of what the term means and agree that it is a helpful term to use.

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[39] Leitao, S., Dzidic, P., Claessen, M., Gordon, J., Howard, K., Nayton, M., & Boyes, M.E. (2017) Exploring the impact of living with dyslexia: The perspectives of children and their parents. *International Journal of Speech and Language Pathology,* 19 (3) 322-34

[40] Gibby-Leversuch, R. Hartwell, B. & Wright, S. (2019). Dyslexia, Literacy Difficulties and the Self-Perceptions of Children and Young People: a Systematic Review. *Current Psychology*, November 2019.

[41] Ross, H. (2017). An exploration of teachers' agency and social relationships within dyslexia-support provision in an English secondary school. *British Journal of Special Education*, *44*(2), 186–202.

[42] Knight, C. (2021). The impact of the dyslexia label on academic outlook and aspirations: An analysis using propensity score matching. *British Journal of Educational Psychology,* 91 (4) 1110-1126

Kent recognises well established research evidence which demonstrates that:

- Dyslexia can occur in children of all abilities[43]. The identification of dyslexia does not rely on identifying a discrepancy between a child's overall cognitive (reasoning and problem-solving) skills and his or her levels of attainment in literacy.

- Those who struggle to acquire literacy skills typically require more individualised, structured, explicit, systematic and more intense reading inputs. Similar principles apply to spelling skills. This means that struggling readers will not simply catch up without this structured intervention in place. Teaching should be explicit, focussed on the academic skill concerned, comprehensive and differentiated[44].

- In terms of providing support for children who struggle to learn to read, there is no meaningful educational difference between the reading difficulties shown by pupils who are considered to have dyslexia and poor readers who do not have this label. Furthermore, effective teaching approaches for those who are determined as having dyslexia are no different from accepted good practice for any other children who struggle with decoding[45].

- It is important to recognise that most children and young people with dyslexia can learn to read but it will take them longer and they may never attain the levels of accuracy and fluency of their peers. Therefore it is important that reasonable adjustments are made for these pupils to ensure that their literacy difficulties do not present a barrier to learning and achievement (i.e. Neurodiverse Friendly approaches and practice).

Evidence suggests that as much as one-fifth of children may have continued delays or difficulties in the development of reading and/or spelling skills. These needs are predictable within the education system. They are acknowledged to have significant impact on the educational and life experience of children and young people. The means to remedy these difficulties are educational in nature. This means that severe and persistent literacy difficulties, including dyslexia, are considered to be a mainstream issue.

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[43] Vellutino, F.R., Fletcher, J.M., Snowling, M.J., & Scanlon, D.M. (2004) Specific Reading Disability (dyslexia): what have we learned in the past four decades? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 45(1) 2-40

[44] Grigorenko, E., Compton, D., Fuchs, L., Wagner, R., Willcutt, E., & Fletcher, J. (2020). Understanding, educating, and supporting children with specific learning disabilities: 50 years of science and practice. *American Psychologist*, *75*, 37–51. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000452

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Box 1.

What is meant by 'severe' and 'persistent'?

Standardised measures may be used to understand performance of an individual in relation to a norm-referenced group. The SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC, 2022) suggests a difficulty may be regarded as severe where there is at least 1 standard deviation below the mean (representing a score within the attainment of the lowest 16% of the population) while the DSM V suggests that standardised scores below the 16th percentile* might <u>indicate</u> a specific learning difficulty and scores below 7th percentile would be <u>most consistent</u> with specific learning difficulties. A decision on whether the difficulty is severe should not be informed by a single source and professional judgement should always be used. Class teachers and SENCos are considered to have the skills and knowledge about pupil's learning to be able to make this judgement following use of appropriate assessments. The following could be taken into account when determining the severity of the difficulty: low scores in one or more standardised tests of reading accuracy, reading fluency and spelling; lack of automaticity in speeded or time-pressured tasks; limited response to sustained and monitored evidence-based intervention.

According to SASC, persistent difficulties can be considered to mean lower than expected age-related levels of literacy attainment (e.g. in reading fluency, accuracy and comprehension; spelling accuracy; writing accuracy and fluency) that persists for longer than a year despite evidence-based intervention that is in place and has been subject to Assess, Plan, Do, Review. It is likely that these difficulties will have been evident from the early school years (Snowling, Hulme, Nation 2020 p.507 – SASC). Persistent does not imply unchanging. It is important to acknowledge the maturation of compensatory factors such as cognitive strengths or the presence or lack of early intervention or sustained support. It is suggested that dyslexia need only remain disabling (although it may remain challenging) if the individual is unable to cope with the literacy demands of learning, even when appropriate arrangements are in place (Snowling, Hulme & Nation 2020).

*_**Percentiles** are a method of comparing a child's or young person's performance with those of children of the same age. For example, if a child or young person were to score at the 20th percentile this would mean that 80 out of every 100 children or young person of the same age would be expected to score higher._

Following the principles outlined above, a formal diagnostic report identifying dyslexia is **not** required to access additional educational support.

What is most important is that all children's difficulties with literacy are identified and addressed in ways that promote progress, whether or not they are:

- described in terms of dyslexia (Rose Review, 2006),
- in a primary school, secondary school or at college,
- in a mainstream school, a mainstream grammar school or a special school.

Kent schools are expected to:
- Complete training to support understanding of pupils with severe and persistent literacy difficulties, such as dyslexia awareness training.

- Regularly review their training in order to keep up to date in line with national developments.

- Seek out further professional support to further review their interventions for impact.

Here is a link to the British Dyslexia Association, Dyslexia Friendly Schools Good Practice Guide. https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/shop/books/dyslexia-friendly-schools-good-practice-guide-2nd-edition

Assistive Technologies

Assistive technologies can support children, young people and adults to overcome the barriers presented to them by their literacy difficulties. This area is continually growing and improving. Access to assistive technology can provide pupils with a way to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding which can be difficult without this support. Children and young people are better able to develop independence, feel less reliant on adult support and experience empowerment if they have access to technology.

Schools may wish to consider how assistive technology could be used within a graduated approach to supporting literacy   Low cost options are readily available, such as using the accessibility features within Microsoft Word. Further options might include speech-to-text and text-to-speech software; mind-mapping tools to help plan work effectively; task management software, word processing software; spell checkers; reader pens. Some training and support may be required for the pupil to use assistive technologies, and to ensure their participation, performance and independence in learning is increased.

Managing the needs of pupils with Literacy Difficulties beyond Primary School

Some pupils will continue to require ongoing support with their developing literacy skills as they leave primary education and move into secondary education and beyond. The expectations from Ofsted are clear[46] – reading should continue to be explicitly taught where needed in secondary schools. The body of knowledge that needs to continue to be taught is based on synthetic phonics to give the young person the skills they need for independent reading. However, the pedagogy i.e. the *way* it is taught needs to be considered and adapted to make it suitable for older pupils. This may include schools investing in age-appropriate phonics material and 'Hi-Lo' reading books that offer content of high interest but edited text to suit a lower reading age.

In addition pupils make progress when schools make full use of the technological resources available to them to remove barriers to learning created by poor reading or writing skills. When school practitioners teach pupils how to make best use of supportive technologies and also engage young people in conversations that recognise their strengths and the strategies that assist them in overcoming the barriers created by their difficulties with literacy, pupils make progress.

Effective Use of Teaching Assistants to Deliver Literacy Interventions

Teachers have responsibility for children's learning, reviewing progress and working to generalise intervention work into the classroom. Teaching assistants working in mainstream schools and supporting the needs of learners with literacy difficulties make the most difference when they:

- Are deployed to deliver high quality one-to-one and small group support using structured evidence-based interventions;
- Are trained to deliver these interventions;
- Are used to add value to what teachers do and not replace them;
- Help pupils to develop independent learning skills and manage their own learning.
- Make explicit connections between the structured interventions they deliver and the learning in everyday classroom teaching

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[46] Ofsted (2022). 'Now the whole school is reading': supporting struggling readers in secondary school. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/now-the-whole-school-is-reading-supporting-struggling-readers-in-secondary-school [accessed 13/06/23]

Please see the following report on the effective use of teaching assistants for more information:

https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/guidance-reports/teaching-assistants

Access Arrangements

Access arrangements for public examinations are based on evidence of need and normal ways of working. It is the responsibility of the school to make arrangements for this in accordance with the procedures laid out by the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) for secondary-age examinations or the Standards and Testing Agency for Key Stage 2. Parents/carers are advised to speak to their child's school well in advance of their child's examination year if they believe access arrangements are required as private reports or assessments not commissioned by the examination centre may not be accepted by the JCQ.

Access arrangements/reasonable adjustments for pupils with SEND taking the Kent Test also require evidence of need and of pupils' normal ways of working. Schools must not rely on private reports / assessments as evidence. It is the responsibility of the school to request special arrangements from KCC where they are appropriate – requests are not made by parents. Guidance and a link to an application form will be provided to schools by the School Admissions Team (part of Fair Access) in late May / early June, as prospective candidates come to the end of Year 5. Applications must be made and school evidence uploaded by the given deadline (normally in early July). Late applications cannot be accepted. If you need more advice, email kent.admissions@kent.gov.uk .

Other practitioner reports and dyslexia screeners

All appropriate assessment information can be useful to build a better understanding of the child. Schools should make use of any appropriate assessment information made available to them, including assessments from private practitioners, such as a dyslexia or occupational therapy report, screening tools etc., to increase their understanding of pupils' needs.

An assessment or screening tool is of little value in itself unless it is used to make informed judgements about appropriate interventions which are monitored for impact. The final decision about appropriate interventions is the responsibility of the school.

Sometimes, private assessments are completed without input from the school. In these cases the advice does not always take into account the resources, training and expertise that already exists within the school and the wider local offer. Kent schools are invited to use the Local Inclusion Forum Team Meetings to discuss assessment reports and availability or suitability of suggested interventions and strategies for their setting.

Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) and Provision

Difficulties with literacy development are considered to be a mainstream issue to be addressed by all schools, primary and secondary, using the resources they have available to them. Occasionally, concerns about a pupil's literacy level and progress continue despite a rigorous Graduated Response and the provision of SEN Support using the Assess, Plan, Do, Review framework that incorporates advice and recommendations from Locality Resource services. These pupils typically have multiple co-occurring difficulties and other complex presentations.

In such cases, if there is evidence that a child's needs cannot be met from within the resources already available, further assessment may be requested from the Local Authority through an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA), in line with the SEND Code of Practice. This may identify the need for additional resources that can only be delivered via an EHC plan.

Health services, and applications for Disabled Students Allowance may require an assessment diagnosing dyslexia. Should this apply to a student known to you, you or a member of your family for more information, please contact PATOSS; British Dyslexia Association (BDA) or Dyslexia Action.

https://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/

https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/

https://dyslexiaaction.org.uk/

APPENDIX A: The Simple View of Reading

The Simple View of Reading model[47] illustrates oral language processes and their relationship with reading development. Readers need both good language comprehension and good word reading to become good readers.
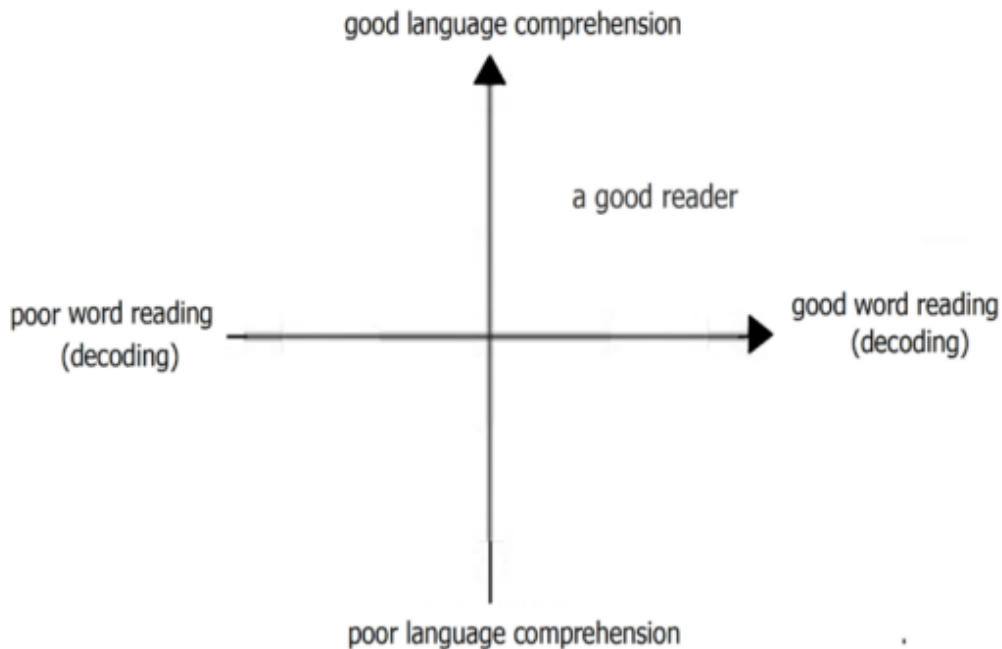
good language comprehension

a good reader

poor word reading
(decoding)

good word reading
(decoding)

poor language comprehension

Figure 1. The Simple View of Reading Model, Gough & Tunmer (1986)

APPENDIX B: Effectiveness of Interventions

Key factors in the effectiveness of interventions depend on:

Interventions being selected which address specific areas of need. As outlined above, not all dyslexic/struggling readers' difficulties have a single cause. As such, interventions should be identified based on assessment which are aimed to address relevant areas, for example:

- ✓ Letter sound accuracy
- ✓ Letter sound fluency

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[47] Gough, P., & Tumner, W. (1986). Decoding, reading and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education, 7*, 6 – 10. *In The Reading Framework – teaching the foundations of literacy https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1102800/Reading_framework_teaching_the_foundations_of_literacy_-_Sept_22.pdf [accessed 13/06/23]*

- ✓ Word identification accuracy
- ✓ Word identification fluency
- ✓ Phonological awareness skills
- ✓ Skills in application of phonic knowledge
- ✓ Alternative approaches to word identification
- ✓ Reading comprehension skills
- ✓ Inference skills
- ✓ Reasoning skills
- ✓ Vocabulary development
- ✓ General knowledge
- ✓ Spelling accuracy
- ✓ Spelling fluency
- ✓ Applying phonic knowledge to spelling
- ✓ Alternative approaches to spelling
- ✓ Skills in planning ideas for writing
- ✓ Study skills
  Etc.

Where evidence-based interventions are used, they **must** be implemented according to the way the programme was designed. Strategies for maintaining effectiveness of an intervention or programme include:

Ensuring that all staff are committed to the fidelity of the programme or intervention.
Everyone must commit to delivering the programme as agreed. Consistency of approach and delivery are critical to ensuring good outcomes for the child or young person.

Taking account of cultural adaptation.
Keep in mind that culture is reflected both in the materials used in the programme and in the aims of what it is trying to achieve. These should be clearly communicated to all concerned, including parents, to ensure joint understanding of the purpose of the programme and the materials to be used,

Considering the language used in the programme or intervention.
Ensure that written and verbal instructions and guidance are understood by the child or young person and that materials used are developmental age appropriate and are of a high level of interest.

Staying true to the duration and intensity of the programme or intervention.
A programme designed to be delivered in six weekly sessions is unlikely to have the same effect if it is delivered in three half days, even if all the content is covered. It is important, therefore, to follow the guidelines for the frequency and duration of the programme or intervention, and the length of each session.

Taking steps to avoid programme drift

Regular monitoring and review of the implementation will help address any unintentional variation from the original programme design.

Staying up-to-date with programme revisions and new materials.
Evidence based programmes are regularly revised and updated to incorporate new research on the programme's effectiveness.

The following are likely to reduce the effectiveness of some of the interventions or programmes:

- reducing the number or length of the group or individual sessions;

- lowering the level of participant engagement, for example by reducing the time for completion of activities from 20 minutes to 10 minutes; or by the supporting adult completing some of the activities for the child or young person;

- removing topics from the programme or intervention, perhaps because of a lack of confidence of the supporting adult, or because an assumption is made that the child or young person already knows the topic well enough;

- using staff or volunteers who are not adequately trained or qualified;

- changing the theoretical approach and incorporating other information that is derived from another theoretical perspective;

- using fewer staff members to deliver the programme or intervention than recommended.

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