

**The Highland Council Psychological Service
Position Statement on Literacy Development in Children and Young People**

Literacy for All in a World of Diversity

The Highland Council Psychological Service endorses the approaches for the development and assessment of literacy for all children and young people adopted in 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity.' These approaches will support schools to meet the expectations of the Highland Literacy Strategy, building on strong GIRFEC practice in Highland. 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity' is grounded in developmental research and aligns with the Scottish Government stretch aims within the National Improvement Framework (Scottish Government, 2021).

The Underpinning Principles of Assessment and Intervention

All children have an equal entitlement to access a broad and balanced curriculum. This includes effective teaching to enable them to develop literacy skills, with support tailored to their needs, based on a cycle of assessment, intervention and review.

The Highland Council Psychological Service approach to assessment and intervention is informed by the guidance document, 'Educational Psychology Assessment in Scotland,' (SDEP, ASPEP, 2014) which describes assessment as 'an ongoing and collaborative process linked to a cycle of planning, intervention and review,' (p1). The Service operates within the current legislative framework of the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* (and as amended 2009), statutory guidance for which was published by the Scottish Government in 2017. The Service also operates within the principles of the national practice model for GIRFEC which provides explicit structures and frameworks for multi-agency work, operationalised locally in the Highland Practice Model (Highland Council, 2017). The staged intervention approach to identification, assessment and intervention is rooted in sound educational practice – teachers plan teaching approaches based on assessment, implement those approaches and review the outcomes in terms of progress made by the child/young person. 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity' exemplifies assessment as an ongoing and collaborative process linked to a cycle of planning, intervention and review.

Best Practice in Language and Literacy Teaching

Research demonstrates the importance of early language development and early fine motor skills for the subsequent development of reading and other academic / social skills (see for example, Duff, 2018). Realising the Ambition, Being Me (Education Scotland, 2020) provides guidance regarding how adults at home and in early learning and childcare provisions can best support the early development of these skills in children through 'playful literacy,' (p70), in the provision of appropriate experiences, interaction and spaces in the early years. In Highland the development of early language skills is further supported through the universal guidance of 'Words Up,' for families and educators and also through the use of the ['Emerging Literacy'](#) programme. In Highland, Emerging Literacy provides a map of key early skills from pre-birth into early primary school. These include developing oral language, phonological awareness, spatial cognition and fine motor skills, as well as early concepts of print. Emerging Literacy provides assessment and teaching tools to enable teachers to differentiate early literacy learning, including systematic phonics and handwriting instruction, according to the developmental needs of each child. The materials can be used in a targeted way for older children also.

Highland Council Psychological Service recognises that literacy teaching in schools needs to build upon these foundations. The Rose Report (Rose, 2006) identified best practice in the teaching of early reading in school settings, recommending, 'quality first teaching' (p16) through a rigorous programme of phonic work embedded within a language-rich curriculum with short, discrete, daily sessions progressing from simple elements to more complex aspects, delivered at a brisk pace, firing children's interest, engaging in multi-sensory activities, drawing on stimulating resources and where children are praised for effort as well as achievement. These features are all evident in 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity.'

Highland Council Psychological Service also acknowledges that, even when best practice for language and literacy development in the early years has been in place, some children may still struggle to progress and may need additional support to build the essential early literacy skills. In addition to identifying the features of best practice in literacy teaching, the Rose Report also considered what range of provision best supports children with significant literacy difficulties, recognising that, 'incipient reading difficulties can be prevented, or nipped in the bud, by thorough, early assessments of ... performance, the information from which is then used to adjust and tailor work more closely to ... needs.' (p41). The Rose Report stresses the importance of a whole school approach, supported by school management and well-trained staff. The Report recommends (p42) the use of a wave approach to supporting children experiencing difficulties with literacy development where interventions are informed by individual assessment results and often delivered within the regular classroom, as follows:

- *Wave 1 – the effective inclusion of all children in daily, 'quality first teaching'*

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- *Wave 2 - additional interventions to enable children to work at age related expectations or above*
- *Wave 3 – additional, highly personalised interventions, for example, specifically targeted approaches for children identified as requiring [additional] support.*

This is the model for support used in 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity.'

Dyslexia and Persistent Literacy Difficulties

The wave approach is appropriate to use with all children and young people, including those who may be identified as having dyslexia / persistent literacy difficulties. (See below for definitions used in the Highland Council Psychological Service and discussion of these.)

In recent years an independent review of education for children and young people with dyslexia has been undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Government, with an interim report, 'Making Sense: Education for Children and Young People with Dyslexia in Scotland' published in 2014 and the 'Making Sense Programme: Final Report' published in 2020 (Scottish Government, 2014 and 2020). The programme recommended improved training, access to up-to-date practical advice for schools, learners and parents and also action to improve the quality of educational outcomes for learners with dyslexia. The 'Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit' (re-launched in 2017) now provides a wealth of up-to-date practical advice which can be accessed at <http://addressingdyslexia.org/>. At the national level, training for education staff is now available through the 'Route Map for Career Long Professional Learning for Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice' developed by Education Scotland <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/route-map-through-career-long-professional-learning-clpl-for-dyslexia-and-inclusive-practice> and also through a series of three linked online courses written by the Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit team and Dyslexia Scotland: <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/index.php?categoryid=329>. Locally, the training available for education staff regarding 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity' includes what teachers will need to know in order to be able to assess, identify and intervene for children and young people with dyslexia, using the wave approach.

In the 'Route Map for Career Long Professional Learning for Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice' (Education Scotland, 2015) it is noted that people with dyslexia will benefit from early identification, appropriate intervention and targeted, effective support at the right time. Regarding the process of identifying dyslexia, it is noted in the Route Map that one single test or screener for dyslexia is not enough, stating that:

The assessment of dyslexia in children and young people in schools in Scotland:

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- *is a process rather than an end-product. The information provided in the assessment should support the learner's next steps for learning.*
- *should be a holistic and collaborative process which takes place over a period of time, drawing on a range of observational and assessment methods. (p22)*

In line with these recommendations, use of the 'Three Wave Model' in 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity' enables school staff to assess, intervene, track and monitor the progress of all children and young people, including those who may be dyslexic, gathering contextual information over time, using evidence based and individualised teaching approaches, so that teachers can be confident that they can identify for themselves which children in their class are experiencing persistent difficulties with literacy and may be dyslexic and which strategies and materials they should use to address their individual needs. Children and young people who are identified as dyslexic will benefit from the same range of supportive interventions as others. What is important is that the choice of intervention matches individual need and that the impact of any intervention is tracked and monitored in order to inform planning for next steps. The 'Three Wave Model' used in 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity' encompasses this, making useful links both to the bank of information and resources provided by the Scottish Government on the 'Addressing Dyslexia' website and also to research which identifies evidence based approaches, for example, Lavan and Talcott eds. (2020) and guidance provided by the Education Endowment Foundation which can be found here:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/guidance-for-teachers/literacy>).

Definitions and Identification of Dyslexia

On their website, the Scottish Government (2022) give the following definition.

Dyslexia can be described as a continuum of difficulties in learning to read, write and/or spell, which persist despite the provision of appropriate learning opportunities. These difficulties often do not reflect an individual's cognitive abilities and may not be typical of performance in other areas.

The impact of dyslexia as a barrier to learning varies in degree according to the learning and teaching environment, as there are often associated difficulties such as:

- *auditory and/or visual processing of language-based information*
- *phonological awareness*
- *oral language skills and reading fluency*
- *short-term and working memory*
- *sequencing and directionality*
- *number skills*
- *organisational ability*

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- *motor skills and co-ordination may also be affected.*

While the Highland Council Psychological Service acknowledges the fact that children with dyslexia may or may not experience some of the associated difficulties noted above, preference is given to the British Psychological Society's (BPS) definition which emphasises a staged process of assessment through teaching. This definition was arrived at as a result of a working party whose remit was to review relevant research and to survey practice so as to clarify the concept of dyslexia, its links with literacy learning/difficulties and implications for educational psychology assessments. Since its publication in 1999 (Reason et al.), national developments have been congruent with the main thrust of the report. Dyslexia is now regarded as a learning difference and this formulation has enabled educational psychologists to assist in the development of effective school-based adaptations and interventions and provides the basis for identifying those children at the extreme end of the continuum whose difficulties are severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities.

The British Psychological Society definition is as follows:

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. (Reason et al, 1999, p11)

This definition provides clarity for parents/carers, professionals and all others with an interest in the achievement and wellbeing of children.

This definition is used for the following reasons:

- It focuses on observed and observable difficulties, rather than possible underlying causes, which reflects the ongoing debate concerning literacy development and dyslexia, and the absence of an agreed single causal explanation.
- Current research evidence does not suggest that a particular profile of cognitive or thinking skills needs to be identified in order to classify a child/young person as having dyslexia.
- Current research evidence suggests that dyslexia can occur in children/young people of all abilities. The definition does not rely on identifying a supposed discrepancy between a child's abilities in one area and his/her abilities in other areas. Most investigators agree that severe reading problems arise due to the failure to read words out of context. Research clearly indicates that discrepancy defined "dyslexics" and non-discrepancy defined (i.e. low IQ readers) do not differ in the cognitive sub skills that underlie the development of word recognition ability. Moreover, there is no evidence suggesting that



discrepancy defined and non-discrepancy defined poor readers respond differently to educational interventions.
(see for example, Stanovich and Siegel, 1994; Elliott, 2020).

With regard to teaching and learning within the curriculum, dyslexia is defined as severe and persistent difficulties with “word level” work – i.e. reading and spelling of individual words. Research evidence states that dyslexic difficulties can occur in children of all abilities. In following this evidence, Highland Council Psychological Service recognises that whilst dyslexia may occur as a specific learning difficulty, this is not necessarily the case as a child/young person may have a range of learning difficulties of which dyslexia may be one component. However, it should be recognised that children/young people with dyslexia can demonstrate marked differences between their abilities in different areas – particularly oral versus text-based skills – and that recognising and building on their strengths can increase their success and engagement with learning.

The definition used does not rely on identifying a particular profile of cognitive skills. However, positive indicators would include:

- difficulty in processing the sounds in speech
- difficulty linking speech sounds to written letters
- short term or working memory difficulties.

‘Phonological processing’ difficulties are core to most scientific hypotheses about the causes of dyslexia (see for example Snowling, Hulme and Nation, 2020)

Dyslexia and other learning difficulties

All learning difficulties, including dyslexia, are complex and interactive in their nature and so can only be fully understood with reference to a range of contexts in which they occur.

Highland Council Psychological Service recognises the particular links there can be between dyslexia, low self-esteem and the subsequent development of emotional and behavioural difficulties in some children/young people. With current increased understanding of neurodiversity, it is also recognised that people with an identification of dyslexia may also have other neurodevelopmental differences. Every child/young person has an entitlement to early and effective support in overcoming the barriers to achievement presented by dyslexia and other neurodevelopmental differences and it is recognised that this is essential in securing a child’s social and emotional adjustment, as well as supporting their measured attainment.

Teachers following ‘Literacy for All in a World of Diversity’ will gather information from literacy assessment, on a literacy tracker. This will support them to identify when interventions at waves one, two or three are required. A further recommendation in ‘Literacy for All in a World of Diversity’ is that teachers build a

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chronology of any wider needs observed in those children who require wave two or wave three interventions. Use of the literacy tracker and the chronology together will support teachers to identify the appropriate time to complete a Form One regarding a child with additional needs, to support a consultation with an additional support needs teacher, following the staged approach as part of the Highland Practice Model. At this stage, school staff may also find it helpful to use the Highland Neurodevelopmental Profile Wheel to record and analyse the range of difficulties a child or young person is experiencing in order to identify appropriate support strategies. The Neurodevelopmental Profile Wheel can be downloaded here: <https://www.thepineshighland.com/neurodevelopmental-differences> .

The Role of the Educational Psychologist in relation to Literacy Development and Support

The Currie Report (Scottish Executive, 2002) lays out the breadth of possible roles for educational psychologists in Scotland, identifying five core functions (consultation, assessment, intervention, training, research) across three levels (child and family, school or establishment, local authority). The role of the educational psychologist in relation to literacy development and support in Highland crosses these functions and levels.

Educational psychologists in Highland have contributed to local authority strategy and training development in the multi-agency working group for 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity,' bringing their knowledge of child development and current research.

Educational psychologists will contribute to the delivery of training regarding 'Literacy for All in a World of Diversity,' particularly through facilitating the local network meetings for teachers which are a core feature of the training programme. Here educational psychologists will bring their knowledge of effective implementation and change processes, understanding the importance of both programme fidelity and ongoing support following training, and will use a coaching approach with teachers in these contexts to support them to problem-solve regarding practicalities and processes in their own settings.

Following the staged approach within the Highland Practice Model, educational psychologists (and/or other multi-agency colleagues) may also become involved in consultation with school staff (and/or families) in more complex cases, when children are not making adequate progress as a result of school-based action. They may work with school staff and families (not necessarily directly with the child), to achieve a better understanding of the factors that may be helping or hindering progress and to identify ways forward. In a very few complex cases an educational psychologist may contribute more directly to assessment in order to achieve this understanding. In undertaking such assessments, Highland Council educational psychologists will

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be exploring the interaction between the cognitive processes in the child, the educational environment and the learning opportunities and teaching methods which have been available. Any assessment will also take account of the rights of children and young people to be treated fairly, to be heard and to be as healthy as possible, in line with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill* (2021).

Psychologists undertaking any detailed assessment will make use of the most recent professional guidelines to them, currently including the ASPEP and Scottish Division of Educational Psychology guidance document, 'Educational Psychology Assessment in Scotland' (2014).

Psychological assessment will:

- Ideally be conducted over time and in relation to different contexts.
- Be formative in nature
- Involve parents/carers as essential contributors to the process.
- Consider the young person's strengths and difficulties and generate a number of hypotheses that consider the range of issues.
- Incorporate the child's understanding of his/her world.
- Consider the role that social and emotional responses, including the child's self-perception and self-esteem, may be playing in contributing.
- Draw, where appropriate, on views of other professionals.
- Be reported back formally in writing to the pupil, parents, school staff, and other relevant professionals where appropriate.

The primary purpose of a psychological assessment will be to make a positive difference to the child's experience in school and across the curriculum.

September 2022

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