



Literacy for All

How to support children with literacy difficulties in schools

“Reading is one of the most complex activities human beings engage in, and one of the most difficult to understand”

(Stuart and Stainthorp, 2016)

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Introduction

Literacy skills form the bedrock of the majority of learning activities that take place day to day in school. How children develop literacy skills does vary between individuals, with skills developing at different ages. The majority of children and young people acquire the necessary skills to become fluent readers after a period of teaching and practice. Over a period of time, some children can experience persistent difficulties with literacy, which can result in academic disengagement. The impact of literacy difficulties is not limited to school alone. There is a wealth of research that highlights the long-term social and economic impact, such as unemployment, poverty, offending behaviour (Bennett, 2008; Györfi & Smythe, 2010).

Although there is a significant amount of disagreement on the definition and grouping of children with persistent literacy difficulties, there are areas of consensus, namely:

- the importance of early intervention
- the impact on wellbeing.

The experience of a child's difficulty constantly being exposed and judged can result in significant emotional distress and disengagement from learning (Riddick 1996; 2010). For many children and young people, the difficulties they encounter acquiring fluent literacy skills can result in them developing negative self-beliefs, where they have attributed their difficulties with literacy as a marker of being incompetent or unintelligent (Pollack, 2008). There are a number of key myths that need to be dispelled to reframe the negative self-beliefs that individuals have, which can support their wellbeing, including:

Literacy skills are not evolutionary

There is often an assumption, made by children and adults, that reading and other literacy skills are evolutionary and should develop with ease in the same way as speaking and walking skills emerge (Elliott and Nicolson, 2016). This can be a very damaging misconception, as reading is not an evolutionary skill. Reading and writing are complex cultural activities, where spoken language has been mapped onto a writing system, which varies from language to language. English is one of the most challenging alphabetic languages to learn, with the process of learning to read taking twice as long compared to some other European languages (Stuart and Stainthorp, 2016).

There is not a link between reading difficulties and intelligence

The link between intelligence (i.e., IQ) and literacy acquisition has been strongly discredited by research. Literacy difficulties occur across a range of intellectual abilities (Rose 2009). The development of academic knowledge and understanding of literacy needs has possibly contributed to the confusion in establishing a consensus on how to define a literacy difficulty.

The concept of dyslexia was originally strongly linked to the "discrepancy model" where an individual has good cognitive abilities (IQ) but struggles to acquire fluent literacy skills. Research is clear, the most effective interventions to develop literacy skills are consistent for all learners, no matter their underlying cognitive ability.

Early Intervention

Another area of consensus is the importance of early intervention. Research strongly supports the need to closely monitor the development and acquisition of literacy skills, during the early stages of teaching. Children's progress does vary significantly, but it is important that difficulties are identified as soon as possible, as early identification and intervention for literacy difficulties have been shown to be more effective at this stage, compared to interventions for older children (Denton, C. A., & Vaughn, S., 2010).

Leaving the politics of the dyslexia debate to one side, there is a need to ensure rigorous and robust systems are in place, to support all children who experience literacy difficulties. Their needs must be identified early and support should be given to support children to acquire the necessary literacy skills to make them successful in school, and as they progress into adulthood.

Aim

The Department of Education, Sport and Culture (DESC) launched a public consultation in May 2021, which sought the views of parents, carers and teachers, on how DESC could better support children with specific literacy difficulties/dyslexia.

DESC received 418 responses to the consultation (234 parents/carers and 184 school staff responded to the questionnaire over 5 weeks, from 19th April to 24th May 2021). A range of views were expressed from the respondents around, which have been grouped in the following themes:

- Early Intervention
- Staff Training
- Assessing Literacy Skills
- Literacy difficulty verses a diagnosis of dyslexia

This report has considered the main themes from the consultation, and linked these findings to the current research, and evidence-based on how best to support all children and young people to develop good literacy skills. Based on these findings several recommendations and suggestions have been made.

Context

A review of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) profile on the Isle of Man was completed in 2018, and highlighted a large number of children and young people (25%) were staged on the SEN register in schools, with their primary area of need identified as a specific learning difficulty (including dyslexia). The percentage of children and young people identified with literacy difficulties seems high, particularly when population estimates are closer to 10% (Dyslexia International, 2017). The number

of children and young people identified as having a specific learning difficulty on the Isle of Man in 2018, was higher than other areas of the UK¹.

Prevalence of specific learning difficulty (including dyslexia) in other areas varies significantly when benchmarked in 2018:

- Scotland identified 23%
- England identified 13%
- Wales identified 8.3%.

Speech and language skills are considered an important precursor to the development of strong literacy skills. A language screener is completed for the majority of children when they are in their Reception Year. Evidence from the language screener, suggests speech and language skills on the Isle of Man are particularly strong when benchmarked to the UK.

There does appear to be a discrepancy between the attainment level achieved in reading, and the strong language profile of children on the Isle of Man in their Reception Year, compared to the high number of children and young people who are identified as having specific learning difficulty (including dyslexia).

Literacy for All

When considering the feedback from parents and teachers, and exploring the academic literature on the teaching of literacy, the following themes and recommendations have been identified and offered for consideration:

- Early Intervention
- Staff Training
- Assessing Literacy Skills
- Literacy difficulty verses a diagnosis of dyslexia

Theme 1 - Early Intervention

Difficulty journey to have needs recognised

Survey Results:

- i. A large majority of the parents found the journey to gain support and recognition for their child either very difficult (59%), or difficult (20%). With almost 80% of respondents reporting difficulty in having needs identified, it's important to consider the possible barriers at play.
- ii. There was a mixture of responses from parents with children on the special needs register (37%), and from parents whose children are not (33%), which indicates the concerns around

¹ When interpreting data across jurisdictions, it is important to be mindful of the different customs and practice that could influence how needs are categorised and grouped.

literacy, from a parental perspective, are broader, and not solely focused on children with SEN.

Research:

- iii. Teachers are best placed initially to identify, and support children and young people who are not making expected progress with their literacy. School based assessment can facilitate early intervention and enable appropriate interventions to be implemented to address specific areas of need. School based assessments typically measure phonological awareness, reading accuracy, reading fluency, reading comprehension, spelling and writing, and help the teacher to identify the specific areas of literacy that require improvement.
- iv. There is strong evidence supporting the need to closely monitor the development and acquisition of literacy skills, during the early stages of skill development. Children's progress does vary significantly, but it is important difficulties are identified as soon as possible, as early identification and intervention for literacy difficulties have been shown to be more effective at this stage, compared to interventions for older children (Denton & Vaughn, 2010).

Interventions & support

Survey Results:

- i. 54% of parents reported that their child did not use any assistive technology, with an additional 18% not answering this question. Furthermore, 52% of staff reported that they are not confident in using assistive technology.
- ii. Just under half of the parents (46%) had accessed private tuition to support their child with literacy.
- iii. 67% of staff feel that a structured and tailored phonics approach is essential for supporting children and young people with literacy difficulties/dyslexia.

Research:

- i. The available evidence clearly indicates that it is important how phonics is taught, so it may help to consider the following features of effective programmes:
 - (i) Training—ensure all staff have the necessary pedagogical skills and content knowledge, for example, sufficient linguistic knowledge and understanding.
 - (ii) Responsiveness—check if learning can be accelerated or extra support is needed and identify specific capabilities and difficulties to focus teaching.
 - (iii) Engagement—lessons engage pupils and are enjoyable to teach.
 - (iv) Adaptations—carefully consider any adaptations to the programme as they may reduce its impact.
 - (v) Focus—a responsive approach to grouping pupils is likely to help focus pupil's effort and improve teaching efficiency.

- ii. There is a large body of evidence demonstrating that phonological awareness and processing (that is, awareness and processing of speech sounds) plays an important causal role in dyslexia, and that providing teaching which includes phonological awareness improves literacy skills in this group (Bus & Ijzendoorn, 1999; Melby-Lervåg, Lyster, & Hulme, 2012). Indeed, phonological awareness training is useful for almost all children (Ehri et al., 2001). Nonetheless, phonological awareness deficits are neither necessary nor sufficient for explaining literacy difficulties (Carroll & Breadmore, 2018; Carroll, Solity, & Shapiro, 2016), and recent evidence indicates dyslexia occurs because of multiple risk factors (Pennington et al., 2012), with phonological awareness likely to be the most important risk factor.

Theme 2 – Staff Training

The need for additional teacher training for literacy

Survey Results:

- i. Training for teaching staff was identified as an important area for development by teachers and parents. The majority of parents reported they feel teaching staff are not knowledgeable or lack knowledge of literacy difficulties and dyslexia.
- ii. A majority (65%) of the staff report they have not received formal phonics training in the last 5 years, with 10% not receiving formal literacy training since their teacher training.
- iii. Additionally, 55% of staff last received training for literacy difficulties/dyslexia over 5 years ago. Furthermore, when teachers were asked what specific training, they had received with regard to literacy difficulties/dyslexia only 24% had undergone training for removing the barriers.
- iv. 56% of parents feel staff are not knowledgeable or lack knowledge in literacy difficulties/dyslexia. 52% of parents feel that staff do not have satisfactory access to training in such areas.
- v. Staff reported high confidence in delivering a phonics programme, with 67% being either very confident or confident. However, only 40% of staff are confident in supporting students with dyslexia but 64% are confident in supporting students with literacy difficulties. This discrepancy highlights a misconception between the difference between literacy difficulties and dyslexia.
- vi. Only 51% of staff are confident in using standardised assessments for literacy.

Research:

- v. Research has identified a high-quality universal literacy framework that covers a range of literacy skills is the most effective intervention for developing literacy skills. There are many components that need to be incorporated into a literacy framework, to ensure successful literacy skills are developed. Literacy interventions need to be flexible and adaptable to support personalised learning of all children. Programmes of this nature, offer the best outcomes for all children, including those experiencing more difficulty acquiring literacy skills (EEF, 2021).
- vi. Research suggests that when children and young people have access to high quality literacy interventions, the prevalence of literacy difficulties decreases significantly. Reductions in need can fall from over 20% to as little as 4-6% (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014).

Interpretation:

- vii. There is a clear role for class teachers to be identifying children and young people who have trouble with their literacy development. Teaching staff are well placed to identify needs early and offer targeted support. Clarity over the role of teaching staff and how they can identify, support and monitor children and young peoples' literacy development is important. Part of the difficulty raised in the survey around identification of need, could be linked to the different definitions used by parents and teachers for dyslexia, with the threshold being potentially higher in schools, before needs are recognised. Another possible issue to consider, is that schools on the Isle of Man have taken a broader approach to teaching literacy, with other elements of literacy forming the focus for teacher-based assessment.
- viii. There appears to be agreement between parents and teachers of the need for further training in literacy. Once again, having a clear definition of what constitutes a literacy difficulty, and an agreed approach to teaching literacy could be helpful for teaching staff and parents.

Theme 3 – Assessing Literacy Skills

Literacy profile of need

Survey Results:

- i. The most common difficulties identified by parents were spelling (81%) and writing (74%), which was followed by reading (66%). When reviewing the comments by parents, concerns about spelling were raised by several parents who had secondary aged children. One secondary school provided a separate written response, which highlighted concerns regarding spelling and reading levels at transition.

Research:

- ii. Literacy describes a range of complex skills. It includes the word-level skills, spelling and word-reading, and the text-level skills, reading comprehension and writing composition. The overall aim of these skills is to enable an author to communicate their message and a reader to decipher and receive it. Word reading, spelling, reading comprehension, and writing composition rely to some extent on the same underlying processes and are therefore inexplicitly linked. Learning to be literate relies on pre-existing oral language and cognitive skills, with the extent of involvement of these processes differing between aspects of reading and writing and at different points during development. As an educator it is important to understand the underlying skills used in reading and writing and how the processes are related, work together, and operate in isolation. This will support planning—ensuring that the right skills become the focus, assessment, so children’s literacy progress can be monitored with any weaknesses identified, and teaching—so support can be adapted to the needs of the child. Wider issues relating to the child and his or her environment that indirectly influence literary development should also inform teaching. These include child-based factors such as hearing, speech and motor difficulties, retrieval speed, metacognition, and executive function. These child factors are influenced further by the environment, such as family background, home language and literacy environment, and whether they speak, read, or write in an additional language.
- iii. Difficulty learning to read is a distinct and very real problem for some children and is not related to overall cognitive ability or effort (Stanovich, 1994). Teachers and others should not make judgements about children’s intelligence on the basis of their literacy skills alone.
- iv. The evidence suggests children benefit from a balanced approach to literacy that includes a range of approaches. The emphasis of approach needs to shift as children progress; effective assessment can help to identify priorities and focus teaching to ensure that it is efficient. Some of the most promising approaches that emerge from the evidence so far include:
 - i) Oral language interventions which focus on spoken language and verbal interaction in the classroom appear to benefit all pupils. Some studies show slightly larger effects for younger children and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. A focus on oral language skills will have benefits for both reading and writing.
 - ii) Phonics approaches – as part of a balanced approach – have been found to be effective in supporting younger pupils (4-7-year olds) to learn to read.
 - iii) Reading comprehension strategies focus on learners’ understanding of the text. They teach a range of techniques that enable pupils to comprehend the meaning of what is written, such as inferring the meaning from context, summarising or identifying key points, using graphic or semantic organisers, developing questioning strategies, and monitoring their own comprehension and identifying difficulties themselves.

Interpretation:

- ii. The complexity of developing literacy skills and vast number of components involved in becoming a fluent reader is well documented (Stuart and Stainthorp, 2016). Without understanding the specific area of difficulties (e.g., phonics etc) it is not possible to identify how best to support an individual's literacy development. Broad assessment tools can often miss the underlying needs and result in interventions being used which will not support that individual's specific area of literacy need. There is a need to use a wide range of school-based assessments, including standardised assessments of attainment and teacher-based assessment, which look at phonics, fluency, comprehension, spelling, writing and oral language skills.

Limitations of teacher-based assessment

Survey Results:

- i. There is no single assessment for persistent reading difficulties and dyslexia, but any assessment can contribute to the overall picture of a child's strengths and weaknesses and it is therefore advisable to read through and discuss the content of the assessment with parents. Findings from the questionnaire demonstrated that 80% of staff use teacher assessment to assess children and young people with literacy difficulties. However, 34% of staff feel this does not provide the detail required to understand a child or young person's literacy profile.

Research:

- i. Assessment over time is considered the most effective approach for supporting individuals who experience difficulties acquiring literacy skills (Vaughn, & Fuchs, 2003). Effective assessments highlight areas of strength and difficulties, should consider a child's reading skills in different areas and should take place over time (Knight, Day and Patton-Terry, 2009).
- ii. Assessment for learning (formative assessment) is widely considered the most effective form of assessing student progress with their learning. Teacher based assessment is underpinned by an assessment over time approach, where a child or young person's response to teaching is monitored closely and teaching instruction is adapted to support the learner to make progress.
- iii. The use of standardised assessments for attainment is recommended to complement and inform teacher-based assessment (Stuart and Stainthorp, 2016). Standardised attainment assessments, used by teachers as part of the assessment for learning, are required to establish a more detailed literacy profile, as teacher-based assessment does not always look at specific areas of literacy skills in such detail.

Interpretation:

- iv. There appears to be some confusion in relation to the use of standardised assessments in education, with many making the association with mass testing of children and young people through summative assessments (e.g., SATs, GCSEs) which tend to be used as part of a quality assurance framework for schools. The use of standardised assessments for identifying literacy needs is significantly different. This type of assessment, is more diagnostic, which should be used as part of the assessment for learning approach to targeted specific areas of need.
- v. Standardised assessments of literacy should not be used as part of the quality assurance process for schools, as there is a risk of undermining the main purpose of identifying individual learning needs.

Theme 4 – Literacy Debate

Survey Results:

Definition of dyslexia

- i. The data from the questionnaire showed that 79% of teaching staff agreed with Rose's definition that:

"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".
- ii. A majority of parents (58%) agreed with the definition that "*dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty, that can occur across the range of intellectual abilities*". According to this definition dyslexia is deeper than just poor spelling and reading.
- iii. Over half of the staff and parents that completed the questionnaire feel there is a difference between dyslexia and literacy difficulties (58%).
- iv. The data found in the questionnaire demonstrated that (majority) 45% of staff and parents feel diagnosis does not provide sufficient information to fully support a child with dyslexia.

Research:

- i. There has been a significant amount of discussion about the identification and diagnosis of dyslexia within academic literature. There has been a well-documented dyslexia debate, with

conferences, papers and books written on the issue. Elliot and Gibbs, (2008) have completed an extensive review of dyslexia. They highlight that:

"there is a view held by many that 'dyslexia' is a distinct and easily defined problem, that there is a straightforward way of diagnosing dyslexia and once a diagnosis is made there is a clear and 'special' treatment available. However, the term 'dyslexia' is often a substitute word for literacy difficulties and definitions are so broad that they fail to identify anything special or different about dyslexia in comparison to 'poor' readers and spellers.

- ii. Research has found that dyslexia is not a specific subgroup of reading difficulty, which requires unique intervention. The difficulties a dyslexic individual experiences reading is no different to the difficulties others with literacy difficulties encounter. As a result, the interventions required for those with literacy difficulties and those with dyslexia are the same (Elliot and Gibbs, 2008).

Interpretation:

- i. The discrepancy between the definition of dyslexia, identified by most school staff compared to the definition identified by many parents is not surprising given the tensions within the education field. There is currently a significant amount of debate surrounding the validity and use of the term "dyslexia", which stems from the ambiguity surrounding the definition. As can be seen from the findings of the survey, there is no universal definition of dyslexia, which is problematic as it leads to variability in identification and support. Elliot and Gibbs (2008) state that 'there appears to be no clear-cut scientific basis for differential diagnosis of 'dyslexia' versus 'poor reader'. However, over half of the staff and parents that completed the questionnaire feel there is a difference between dyslexia and literacy difficulties (58%).
- ii. The lack of consensus is potentially problematic for the identification of literacy difficulties and could be an avoidable area of tension between schools and parents. To support the development of literacy for all learners, it will be important to develop the understanding and knowledge of parents and teaching staff about dyslexia and the need to identify a literacy profile.
- iii. A needs-based assessment for intervention approach is the most effective approach to meeting the needs of all learners who experience difficulties acquiring literacy skills, particularly as there continues to be no recognised, or agreed, assessment for the identification of dyslexia. In a review in 2009, the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, concluded:

"There is no convincing evidence that if a child with dyslexia is not labelled as dyslexic, but receives full support for his or her reading difficulty, that the child will do any worse than a child who is labelled as dyslexic and then receives specialist help. That is because the techniques to teach a child diagnosed with dyslexia to read are exactly the same as the techniques used to teach any other struggling reader. There is a further danger that an overemphasis on dyslexia may disadvantage other children with profound reading difficulties."

- iv. On balance, understanding of the literacy profile and specific areas of need for an individual experiencing difficulty with literacy is more important, than establishing if the diagnostic criteria

has been met. It is the detailed assessment of the literacy profile that is required to ensure appropriate support and intervention is implemented.

Role of school for assessing dyslexia

Survey Results:

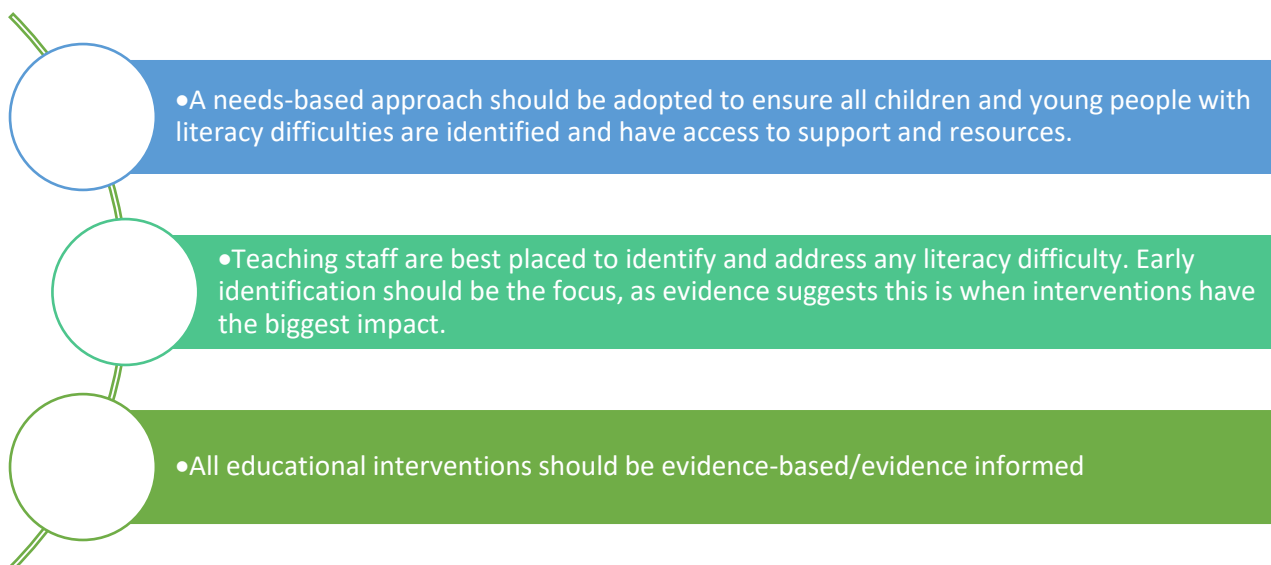
- i. Parents agreed that part of the school's role in supporting additional educational needs of all learners is the identification of pupils who have dyslexia (85%) and literacy difficulties (89%).
- ii. Additionally, 83% of staff feel that the identification of children and young people that are struggling with their literacy skills (phonics, reading, and spelling) is the role of a teacher. However, only 39% are confident in identifying dyslexia and 59% are confident in identifying literacy difficulties.
- iii. Teaching staff also reported low levels of confidence when sharing concerns regarding a child or young person's literacy with the parent.

Interpretation:

- i. The term dyslexia has been used, and continues to be used, in a number of different ways, which is proving to be problematic and unhelpful for many. The previous Dyslexia Policy (2012) on the Isle of Man aimed to use the term dyslexia as a universal term for a literacy difficulty and highlighted the role of teaching staff in identifying and supporting these difficulties. The result of the survey from staff indicates there is some apprehension regarding the identification and assessment of dyslexia and to a degree literacy difficulties more generally.
- ii. It is considered good practice for "diagnostic assessment" for dyslexia to be completed by a specialist teacher who has received additional training in literacy. As a result, many teachers who have not received this additional training may feel they do not have the necessary skills to identify literacy difficulties. The use of the medical model approach in education for dyslexia, does risk disadvantaging some children and young people, whose literacy needs are overlooked or staff feel disempowered to offer literacy support. This is a significant barrier for early intervention. SENCOs and class teachers are well placed to complete standardised attainment assessments (reading, spelling etc) to establish any underlying, which may require intervention or support.
- iii. Assessment of literacy is standard practice for teaching staff, who are able to complete standardised assessments to complement teacher assessment. There are many different aspects and prerequisites to developing successful literacy skills and every child's profile is unique. The identification of specific areas allows interventions to be targeted to a specific area of need, which should support the fundamental difficulty, rather than considering generic strategies. Indeed, using the umbrella term of dyslexia can often result in the specific nature of an individual's difficulty being overlooked.

Recommendations

The principles underlying these recommendations are:



1. Developing an Isle of Man Literacy Framework

- a) It would be helpful to develop an Isle of Man Literacy Framework for all educational settings, which is based on sound scientific research. The framework should cover the foundation skills that underpin good literacy development. The Education Endowment Foundation (2021) have recently updated their literacy guidance for Key Stage 1, which emphasise:
 - The importance of developing pupils' speaking, listening and language skills - including emphasising the need for high-quality adult-child interactions, developing vocabulary, supporting social interaction and supporting problem-solving.
 - Balanced and engaging approach to literacy – supporting decoding and comprehension, engagement and enjoyment.
 - Phonics programme – explicit teaching of letter-sound relationships, adaptable to meet the varied needs of all learners.
 - Developing reading comprehension
 - Supporting writing and development of vocabulary
 - Explicitly teaching spelling
 - Using assessment to inform learning and identify needs
 - Identify high quality structured interventions for children struggling with their literacy.

- b) It may be helpful to setup a task and finish group using appropriately skilled and experienced practitioners and other key stakeholders, to create an Isle of Man Literacy Framework, including the identification of programmes, an implementation framework, training requirements, costs, monitoring etc.

- c) DESC should consider supporting a small number of teachers to access specialist training in literacy. The additional knowledge and skills can be used to inform the Isle of Man Literacy Framework, and also support the cascading of this approach and knowledge across the profession.

Action:

Setup a task and finish group using appropriately skilled and experienced practitioners and other key stakeholders, to create a Manx Literacy Framework, including the identification of programmes, an implementation plan, training requirements, costs, monitoring etc.

2. Literacy Guidance for Parents

- a) There is a need to clarify misunderstandings as this appears to be a particular source of distress for children, young people and their families.
- b) A diagnosis of dyslexia is not recognised by exam boards and will not provide you with additional time or support. Some of the assessments used by professionals as part of the diagnostic process may support exam access arrangements. The majority of these assessments are required despite an existing diagnosis.
- c) The link between literacy difficulties and lack of intelligence - many people mistakenly link literacy difficulties with low intelligence, which can have a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of students, who can develop self-beliefs such as, "I'm stupid".

Action:

A Literacy Working Group should produce a *Guidance for Parents and Carers on Literacy*, to address misconceptions and communicate how to support literacy needs on the Island.

3. Early Intervention

- a) The development of good quality literacy skills starts long before children reach school age. As part of the Isle of Man Literacy Framework, thought and consideration should be given to supporting parents, nurseries and child-care providers with knowledge and skills to support the speaking, listening and language skills of children in their formative years.

Action

Early Years Literacy support for nurseries and childcare settings has been shared and should be reviewed and incorporated into the Isle of Man Literacy Framework.

4. Whole School Training

- a) Identifying a high-quality whole school literacy programme for Key Stage 1 is an essential component of any literacy approach, which will require investment and training.
- b) It will also be important to support school to access training in an evidenced-based targeted reading programme for Key Stage 2 and beyond. Although the evidence of the impact of these

interventions is not as strong as investing in a high-quality universal approach at Key Stage 1, it still forms an important approach to supporting all children and young people who experience difficulties with literacy.

- c) Optima Reading is a specific programme that could be of interest, as it can be used as a universal literacy programme or as a targeted intervention. The flexibility of the programme is linked to the use of "real books" rather than reading schemes, which has also shown to increase motivation and enjoyment of reading.

5. Assessment for Literacy

Focus on persistent literacy difficulties

- a) The lack of consensus on the definition of dyslexia is an ongoing problem internationally that does not look likely to be resolved anytime soon. The diversity and polarised views of stakeholders is evident in the responses from teacher and parents, means it is unlikely to establish a local definition that will not continue to be influence by the ambiguity of divergent views.
- b) On balance, there appears to be more disadvantages is using the term dyslexia, which potentially results in the unintended consequence of disadvantaging other learners with persistent literacy difficulties, due to the ambiguity of the definition of the dyslexia.
- c) Given a large proportion of parents felt a diagnosis of dyslexia was not needed and the fact teaching staff report higher levels of confidence in supporting children and young people with literacy difficulties, and diagnosis was not part of their role, the terminology of literacy difficulties should continue to be adopted.

Action:

Literacy Working group to produce guidance as part of the Isle of Man Literacy Framework which details a needs-based approach. Guidance sent to school and training for staff arranged.

Private and independent assessment of literacy

- a) Although there is not educational need to pursue a formal diagnosis of dyslexia, there are potentially many families who would like to access this type of assessment.
- b) To support children, young people and parents who would like to pursue a formal independent diagnosis of literacy difficulties, it would be helpful for DESC to work with third sector services, such as the Manx Dyslexia Association, to establish this type of assessment process on Island.
- c) The diagnosis of dyslexia is not normally completed by local authority services, as it has no bearing on provision. The majority of assessment are completed by external services, such as Dyslexia Action.

Action:

Private and Independent Assessment of Literacy Guidance is required to clarify the considerations schools should make when private independent assessments have been completed. Literacy Working group to produce guidance, alongside the Manx Dyslexia Association for third sector and schools.

School-based assessment of literacy

- a) Support teachers to use standardised assessments of reading and spelling to complement continuous teacher-based assessment. It is important to note, this is not a recommendation to re-instate SAT like tests. These “diagnostic” assessments should be used to establish specific literacy profiles and inform teacher planning; they should not be used more widely to evaluate school performance, as this could invalidate the assessments.
- b) Adopt a needs-based assessment framework, which identifies the specific areas of literacy that require support, e.g., phonic.
- c) Schools to adopt a graduated response to literacy, with class teachers being able to access more specialist advice and support via the school SENCO and Literacy Coordinator, as needed.

Action:

DESC to provide guidance on best practice and the use of standardised assessments to support teaching and learning. Recommended standardised assessments for identifying a range of literacy needs, to be identified for schools to purchase if desired.

6. Embedding Practice and Standards

It will be important to ensure that any quality assurance framework for schools considers all the elements of a broad and balanced approach to literacy. No single element is more or less important, and each element is required to develop high quality literacy skills for all learners.

Action:

It will be important to ensure that any quality assurance framework for schools considers all the elements of a broad and balanced approach to literacy. No single element is more or less important, and each element is required to develop high quality literacy skills for all learners. The literacy working group to consider how to implement this and consult with Quality Assurance groups.

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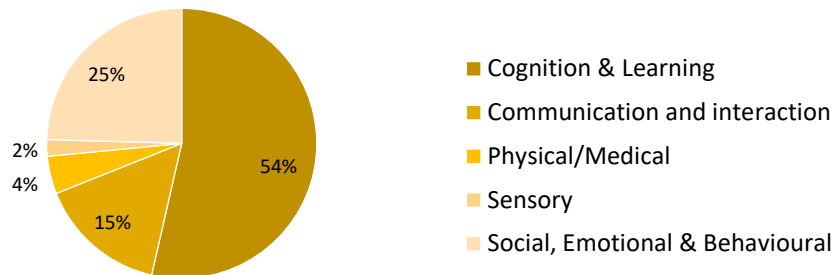
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Appendix 1 - SEN Profile 2018

Isle of Man: Primary Difficulties (2018)



Cognition and Learning was the largest primary difficulty, which can be seen in 53.6% (1129) of pupils with SEN. Dyslexia/literacy difficulties was the most predominant area of need within the Cognition & Learning Domain, affecting 4.6% (491) of the school population and 23.3% of the SEN population.

Benchmarking

