

Teaching Pupils with Literacy Difficulties

Practice Guidance for Essex Schools



2025



1. Aim and Purpose

- 1.1 Essex Local Authority's aim is for all children and young people in Essex to:
- have high quality literacy teaching;
 - have their individual needs identified and met early on, if they have literacy difficulties despite appropriate learning opportunities;
 - get the help they need to make progress in literacy.
- 1.2 The purpose of this guidance is to outline good practice for assessment and teaching of literacy skills for all pupils, including those who present with literacy difficulties. The document may also be used to provide information to parents/carers regarding how schools most effectively meet the needs of children and young people with literacy difficulties. These guidelines have been informed by current research and debate into reading, writing and spelling difficulties.
- 1.3 The Local Authority (LA) has a statutory duty to meet the needs of all children with special educational needs, under The Equality Act, 2010¹ and this guidance has been written to reflect this obligation.

2. Principles

- 2.1 We believe that:
- all children and young people in Essex should have high quality literacy teaching (see our 'Literacy For All' summary framework on p.8);
 - all teachers need to be informed of the most up-to-date theory, research and practice in order to enable them to meet the needs of all children and young people with literacy difficulties²;
 - any literacy difficulty needs to be identified as early as possible so children and young people can receive the support they need when they need it;
 - good quality assessment informs good quality, targeted intervention;
 - all educational interventions should be evidence-based;
 - children and young people's response to intervention needs to be evaluated over time before any conclusions are drawn about their long-term educational needs;
 - all children and young people with literacy difficulties should have fair access to the available resources.

3. Background

- 3.1 This document has been developed by Essex SEND Services in consultation with Essex schools and parents. Consultation with international expertise in the field has confirmed that the content is accurate and appropriate.
- 3.2 This guidance should be read in conjunction with associated documents, including:
- The Essex Ordinarily Available resource (Universal and Targeted levels);
 - The Essex Accuracy and Fluency Assessment of Literacy Skills (AFALS);
 - Teaching Pupils with Literacy Difficulties – Information for Essex Parents (co-created with members of the Essex Family Forum).

4. Content

4.1 This paper outlines:

- Essex County Council's guidance on teaching reading, spelling and writing to children and young people, including those with literacy difficulties;
- the most up-to-date scientific and professional research in relation to the identification of, and intervention for, children and young people with literacy difficulties;
- how literacy needs may be best met in schools.

5. High Quality Teaching

5.1 Literacy is a core skill which underpins all curriculum areas and enables access to the broad and balanced curriculum and everyday life.

5.2 **Development of literacy skills**

Children acquire literacy skills at different ages and at differing rates often well before they reach school age, and as a result may start school with varying levels of literacy. Early Years education should be underpinned by exposure to language- enriched environments where children have regular access to quality books, songs, rhymes, hearing wide ranging language and vocabulary, and regularly listening to stories.

5.3 Early Years education should focus on the following skills that provide the foundation for learning to read:

- an interest in books – this can be encouraged by children having access to a wide range of books and literature, and regularly reading to children;
- a wide vocabulary (knowledge of words and their meaning) – this can be encouraged by talking about the different vocabulary in the books that are being shared and using this vocabulary in discussions with the children;
- awareness of print (knowing that print conveys meaning and that in English words are written and read from left to right) – this can be encouraged by touching the words as they are read, reading words in a range of contexts and purposes and discussing their meaning;
- phonological awareness (ability to hear individual sounds and put them together to make words, and hear a word and split it into individual sounds) – this can be encouraged by playing oral word games such as “I Spy”, “What’s the word?” (listen to the sounds and state the word [synthesis]) and “What are the sounds?” (listen to the word and state the sounds [segmentation]).

5.4 After a period of teaching, some children may demonstrate difficulty in learning to read, write and spell. It is important that delays are identified and addressed as soon as possible, to support their learning and motivation to learn. Early identification and intervention for literacy difficulties with young children have to date been shown to be more effective than interventions for older children³.

5.5 **Staff knowledge and understanding**

Staff should have an understanding of how literacy skills develop, and how to support pupils at different stages of literacy development. Schools should make use of national best practice guidance such as the Education Endowment Foundation Literacy Guidance for Early Years, Primary and Secondary Schools.

5.6 **High Quality Teaching approaches**

High Quality Teaching will incorporate a balance of approaches and strategies that enable pupils at different levels of literacy attainment to access lessons confidently. In all classrooms, the following should be in place:

- teaching adapted and differentiated to the needs of the pupils;
- explicit teaching of core topic vocabulary for all subjects;
- use of varied teaching activities, reducing the dependence on the written word;
- teaching pupils to record their learning in a range of different ways;
- Wave 2 targeted teaching.

5.7 **Assessment of literacy skills**

All schools should have an agreed system for gathering data/assessment information for all pupils. This should include:

- attainment and progress towards year group expectations;
- a system for highlighting which pupils are not reaching expected attainment and progress levels.

5.8 All schools should also refer to the teaching approaches in the Essex Ordinarily Available resource.

6. **SEN Support – Assessment**

6.1 **School-based assessment**

Research indicates that the major task facing teachers of lower achieving pupils is to ensure an appropriate match between the curriculum content and the skills a student has already mastered with those that need to be taught next⁴. Achieving a suitable match can only be achieved through a detailed, fluency-based skills assessment.

6.2 When a child or young person is making less than expected progress in their literacy skills, teachers are best placed to complete accurate school-based assessment in order to identify the specific areas of literacy that need improving and inform the appropriate interventions. Assessments used should measure:

- phonological awareness and phonic skills;
- word reading;
- comprehension;
- spelling;
- writing.

6.3 Detailed reading and spelling assessment materials that measure accuracy, fluency and generalisation of skills are available (at no cost) to all Essex schools in the Essex Accuracy and Fluency Assessment for Literacy Skills (AFALS).

6.4 When it is identified that a pupil needs support which is 'additional to or different from' that which is available to the majority of their peers, One Planning should be started. Information about One Planning is available on the Essex Schools Infolink.

6.5 Please also refer to:

- Appendix 1: Areas of literacy assessment and corresponding intervention;
- Appendix 2: Using Assessment Through Teaching;
- The Essex Ordinarily Available resource on the Essex Schools Infolink.

6.6 **Assessment over time**

Assessment over time and monitoring of the pupil's response to teaching is now accepted as the most effective way of identifying literacy difficulties⁵ or those at risk of literacy difficulties, as well as informing early intervention and determining the rate of progress.

Assessment over time is also referred to as Response To Intervention (RTI) where the aim is to ascertain progress in response to what is termed a well-founded intervention⁶. This is a more helpful measure of a child or young person's needs as it allows for investigation into the effectiveness of the teaching as well as the suitability of the interventions. In addition, this enables teaching staff to adjust their teaching accordingly and improve the rate of learning. It can be repeated at regular intervals and thus can provide a more detailed understanding of children and young people's daily and weekly progress.

Achieving fluency with literacy skills takes a number of years and is also affected by various aspects of a pupil's instructional and cultural experience. A range of factors should be investigated as part of assessment of a pupil's difficulty, including:

- environment;
- learning opportunities;
- exposure to language;
- emotional well-being;
- experience of intervention;
- the quality of support.

6.7 **Emotional well-being**

Some pupils' emotional well-being is negatively affected by having literacy difficulties, and in some cases this can lead to academic disengagement and possible distress.

It is important for schools to have effective assessment and intervention systems in place to meet both the literacy and emotional needs of their pupils, regardless of any particular term used to describe their literacy difficulties. Schools should help pupils understand their difficulties, support them to make progress, and develop a Growth Mindset.

7 **SEN support – Intervention**

7.1 **General considerations for SEN support**

- It is important that both the individual literacy skills causing concern and the pupil's ability to understand the content of lessons are considered when planning a support package.
- 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.
- All pupils are entitled to fair access to the appropriate support that enables them to make progress.
- Accurate assessment will determine whether the child/young person needs support in all areas of the curriculum or only in the areas that have a high reading or written component.
- Reasonable adjustments need to be in place to compensate for any literacy difficulties. Examples of reasonable adjustments in lessons are given in the Essex Ordinarily Available resource.

7.2 Skill development using research-based teaching approaches

An accurate assessment of literacy skills is required to identify the specific areas to address. The content of the intervention will depend on the areas of literacy causing concern and the associated pre-requisite skills. *Please see Appendix 1.*

- 7.3 Following the assessment of literacy skills, an intervention scheme may be identified by the school as an appropriate next step. Schools need to ensure that any intervention to be implemented is evidence-based and the effectiveness of the intervention is evaluated after a period of time. If further assessment shows that the child or young person has not made adequate progress, a more personalised bespoke intervention may be needed.
- 7.4 It is important that the teaching methods used within any intervention have been shown to be effective by high-quality, scientific research. Research emphasises that focusing on how and what pupils are taught is more important than school structures, organisation, or where they are taught. If the teaching is structured well, this is more effective than other factors such as ability grouping, class size, individualised teaching and spending more money⁷.
- 7.5 Research shows that teaching is most effective (for all pupils, including those with literacy difficulties) when it includes the following:
- 7.5.1
- distributed practice, i.e. short, frequent teaching sessions, that incorporate practise of identified skills, as this helps to address any retention/memory difficulties⁸. The more often children and young people practise remembering a skill, the more likely it is to be mastered⁹;
 - an example of this would be that a short, focussed intervention of 5 minutes a day is more effective than two 20 minute sessions a week.
- 7.5.2
- teaching of skills to fluency as well as accuracy¹⁰, by ensuring that there are sufficient opportunities for children and young people to practise and master skills before moving on;
 - an example of this would be expecting children to read known words (old learning) quicker and giving them opportunities to practise these.
- 7.5.3
- Teaching of skills to generalisation in order to ensure that children and young people can apply their skills, knowledge and concepts to different contexts¹¹. Pupils are more likely to read and understand the meaning of words accurately if they see a word in a more diverse context^{12 13};
 - an example of this would be the use of 'real books' that include a varied, diverse and extensive reading experience rather than the over-reliance on books that contain highly decodable texts.
- 7.5.4
- A structured approach that ensures one new skill is taught at a time¹⁴;
 - an example of this would be targeting the reading of certain words rather than targeting reading and spelling of the words together.
- 7.5.5
- More frequently occurring skills are taught before less useful skills¹⁵;
 - an example of this would be teaching the first 100 most common words first (that account for over 50% of written English and not the next 100 words which only account for a further 2-5%)¹⁶.
- 7.5.6
- Tasks that are interleaved (mixing old and new skills)^{17 18} to minimise forgetting^{19 20}. All new learning should be made explicit;
 - an example of this would be teaching 2 new spelling words and then

going over words already learnt rather than having 10 new spellings each week and not including any words previously learnt.

- 7.5.7
 - The use of the Direct Instruction²¹ teaching approach, and errorless learning principles²², to introduce and practise skills;
 - this is the use of the Model-Lead-Test teaching method (my turn, together, your turn) when teaching any new skills or correcting errors – the instructor models correct responses for children to repeat with support until accurate and independent recall is achieved.
- 7.5.8
 - Ensuring children and young people are informed about the purpose of interventions, their achievements and their rate of progress²³;
 - an example of this is explaining why you are teaching the first 100 words and then discuss the progress with the child or young person.
- 7.5.9
 - Peer-assisted learning²⁴
 - examples of this are the use of Paired Reading²⁵ (develops reading accuracy and fluency) and Reciprocal Teaching²⁶ (develops reading comprehension and metacomprehension - for pupils to learn to monitor their own learning and thinking).
- 7.5.10
 - Utilising trained teaching assistants to implement well-founded interventions²⁷
 - An example of this would be training some teaching assistants in Precision Teaching to implement across the school for all children who need it.

7.6 Research also indicates the crucial role vocabulary knowledge and oral language skills play in the reading process²⁸. The explicit teaching of vocabulary to support the development of children's spoken and written language, as well as teacher language usage in the classroom, should always be considered when planning any reading intervention. This should always be in the context of access to good quality literature, and teaching staff who aim to increase the enjoyment of reading through encouraging children and young people to discover and connect with books of their choice.

7.6 Evidence-based interventions

High quality, specifically targeted and evidence-based interventions should be available to all those who need them. This is in line with national guidance for schools, local authorities, parents/carers and professionals.

Pupils' responses to more targeted and systematic teaching approaches need to be monitored to establish their progress and effectiveness of the intervention. It is important that interventions utilise a pupil's interests and strengths, and that structured and robust programmes are selected to target identified specific skills.

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^{29 30}. All pupils need a variety of teaching approaches and activities, and all pupils use their hearing, vision and touch when learning to read and write, however, beyond this research does not support the use of any specific multi-sensory approaches to improve reading and writing³¹.

Systematic reviews of evidence-based interventions such as Lavan and Talcott (2020)³² and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), amongst others, help identify whether

an intervention is effective. Evidence-based programmes should be delivered with the stated frequency, pupil to staff ratio, fidelity and quality, and by staff with necessary skills and training. Parents/carers should be involved in discussions about their child's difficulties and be involved in the reviews of their progress. There have also been advances with assistive technologies which may also be useful to explore.

Examples of effective evidence-based interventions that schools can use are given in the Essex Ordinarily Available Targeted Level Cognition & Learning section.

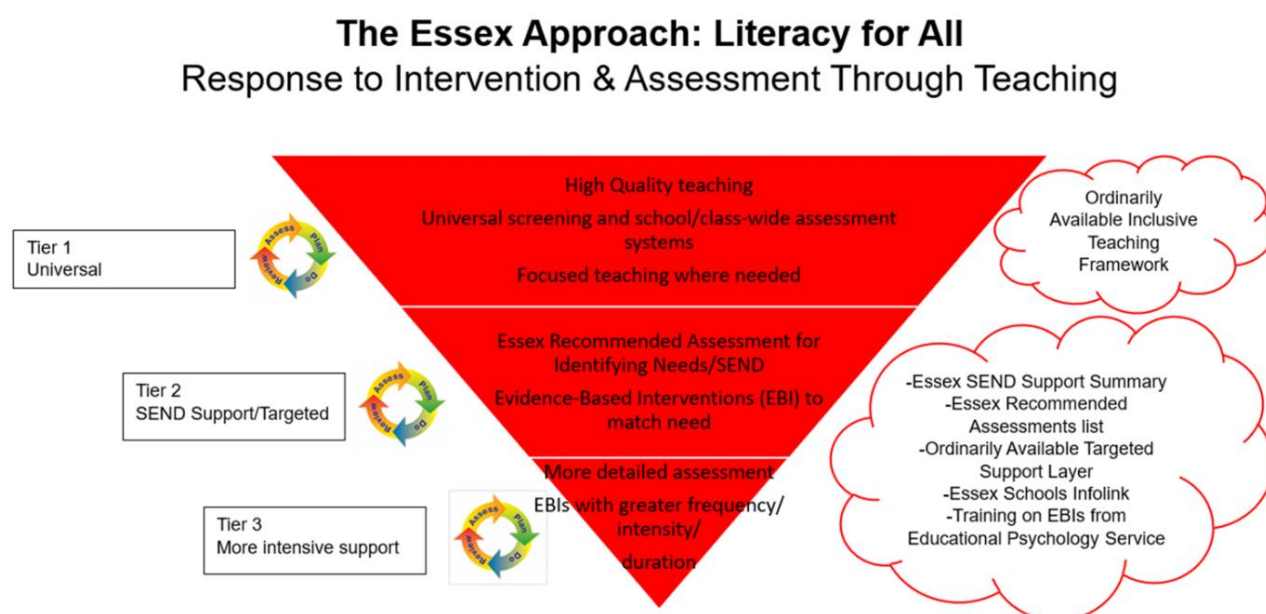
7.7 Framework for support

The Code of Practice (2015)³³ provides statutory guidance for organisations that work with children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), on duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014. The Code stipulates a process of Assess, Plan, Do, Review in identifying and meeting children and young people's SEND needs. Successive cycles of this process include more detailed approaches and more frequent review, and this is referred to as the Graduated Response.

The Assessment Through Teaching (ATT) model³⁴ provides a rigorous framework for the Assess, Plan, Do, Review process. It supports teachers and teaching assistants in monitoring the pupil's access to the curriculum and response to a skill-based intervention. This takes into account assessments over time and emphasises the importance of analysing the teaching when reviewing a pupil's progress. Appendix 2 illustrates how this model is used to address literacy needs.

The majority of pupils' needs should be met within the Graduated Response as described in the SEND Code of Practice within mainstream schools via SEN Support. It is the school's statutory responsibility to meet these needs from their delegated budget. Most pupils' needs are met using a structured and systematic framework within school that incorporates the recommendations detailed above to varying intensity.

Please refer to Appendix 2: Using the Assessment Through Teaching model to address literacy difficulties.



8 Severe and Persistent Literacy Difficulties (SPLD) / dyslexia

- 8.1 Some pupils continue to struggle to learn to read and/or write, despite appropriate assessment and intervention. They present with severe and persistent literacy difficulties (SPLD), and different people sometimes use different terms to describe these difficulties. Some use the term dyslexia.
- 8.2 Essex Local Authority believes that all children and young people experiencing literacy difficulties should be identified as early as possible and receive scientifically-validated intervention. Techniques that do, or may, help alleviate literacy difficulties should be used with all children who need them rather than being dependent on the term used to describe their needs.
- 8.3 **Dyslexia**
The term dyslexia is widely used in scientific studies to describe anyone who struggles with decoding words written on a page or screen, although, in many other cases it is used to describe only a small proportion of struggling readers. The associated difficulties of understanding the meaning of what is being decoded (reading comprehension) is a separate but closely related process.
- 8.4 **Research**
Two comprehensive international literature reviews of the research evidence about literacy difficulties and dyslexia have been produced by Elliott & Grigorenko (2014, 2024)³⁵. These have demonstrated that there is no scientifically agreed definition of the term dyslexia. Research in the field of dyslexia lacks consensus regarding definition and diagnosis, and there are many different explanations for literacy difficulties, none of which have universal agreement.

In terms of catering 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 receive this label. Furthermore, effective teaching approaches for those who are judged to have dyslexia is no different from accepted good practice for any other children who struggle with decoding: in practice, what we need to do to help poor readers is independent of this label.

A wealth of research evidence has demonstrably shown that, in comparison with normally reading peers, those who struggle to acquire reading skills typically require more individualised, more structured, more explicit, more systematic, and more intense reading inputs. Similar principles apply to spelling skills.

In line with the research evidence on the nature and treatment of reading difficulties, the Local Authority recommends that effective assessment and scientifically-validated intervention should operate as early as possible, to assist any pupil who may be experiencing literacy difficulties, whatever terms are employed to describe their difficulties.

8.5 **Assessment for intervention**

The approach of 'assessment for intervention' rather than 'assessment for diagnosis' should be used to guide assessment, teaching, intervention or resourcing for the following reasons:

- there is no universally agreed definition or assessment pathway for a condition labelled dyslexia so any diagnosis is dependent on the interpretation made by the professional completing the assessment³⁶;
- research shows that a diagnosis determined by the discrepancy between a child/young person's intelligence and their reading ability is not

scientifically valid as decoding is not dependent on intelligence, and it is now widely understood that any diagnostic practices based on this principle should now be discontinued³⁷;

- research demonstrates that the key elements of an effective intervention for children and young people with reading difficulties (including those identified with dyslexia) are the same for all, regardless of intelligence³⁸;
- a diagnosis of dyslexia does not provide any additional information (over and above that gathered through effective assessment and identification of an individual's specific severe and persistent literacy difficulties) that is useful for addressing the needs, nor does it predict the rate or likelihood of progress³⁹;
- despite substantial advances in the use of neuroscience and genetics in reading research, these do not yet provide insights that can inform diagnosis and intervention⁴⁰;
- assessment over time, where the child/young person's initial difficulties are identified, and their subsequent response to intervention is monitored, highlights any child/young person who is not making the expected literacy progress, and provides the necessary information required to plan further, more focused and systematic interventions.

8.6 **Severe and persistent literacy difficulties (SPLD)**

In this Practice Guidance, and in work by Essex LA SEND professionals, the term Severe and Persistent Literacy Difficulties (SPLD) is used to describe children/young people who continue to present with severe and persistent literacy difficulties despite appropriate learning opportunities and effective Assessment Through Teaching.

9 **Specialist Support**

9.1 **Educational Psychologist and Inclusion Partner involvement**

Essex Educational Psychologists and Inclusion Partners can supplement the professional skills of school staff to help clarify the learning needs of an individual and identify provision to address these needs based on knowledge and understanding of assessment, evidence-based literacy interventions, the psychology of teaching and learning, child development and knowledge of school systems. Support can be provided to schools through consultation, which may lead to training for school staff or further assessment.

9.2 **Assessments of cognitive skills**

Additional assessments with some pupils are sometimes completed by Educational Psychologists. These tests sometimes show that children and young people with literacy difficulties also have difficulties with cognitive processes such as memory, language and processing. Such assessments can be useful for overall educational planning and ensuring that there is the appropriate level of support and challenge in lessons.

However, assessments of cognitive skills do not provide the information needed to plan literacy interventions and they should not be used to predict progress in literacy. Furthermore, the information derived from individual one-off assessments in isolation is rarely sufficient to draw any reliable conclusions but should be considered alongside other assessment information gathered over time.

10 Statutory Assessment and Provision

- 10.1 Very occasionally, concerns about a pupil's literacy level and progress continue despite a rigorous Graduated Response using the Assess, Plan, Do, Review framework that incorporates advice and recommendations from specialist support services. In such cases, further assessment can be requested from the Local Authority through an Education, Health and Care (EHC) 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.
- 10.2 If an EHC plan is in place, monitoring of the pupil's progress is achieved through the Annual Review process. Effective assessment and intervention continue to be essential.

11 Partnership with Parents/Carers

- 11.1 Pupils' needs are best met when schools and parents/carers work in partnership, where there is mutual trust and where information is transparent and shared. In line with the SEND Code of Practice, parents/carers must be included in discussions and fully informed about the Assess, Plan, Do, Review (One Planning) process undertaken in school to meet literacy needs. Where particular intervention/support approaches are being used in school, it will be important for parents to be aware of these, to inform how they can support their child at home.
- 11.2 If homework is given, it will be important for it to be differentiated appropriately for the pupil's skill levels, as identified through assessment. There should be ongoing close liaison with parents to discuss any barriers to homework being completed, including the emotional aspects of learning.
- 11.3 Essex SENDIASS (independent and confidential SEND Information, Advice and Support Service for parents) is available to help parents/carers access appropriate advice and support in all areas of SEND.
Website: www.essexsendiass.co.uk
Tel: 01245 204 338
Email: send.iass@essex.gov.uk

Frequently Asked Questions to Schools

1. What can I do as a parent/carer if I am concerned about my child's literacy skills?

It can be very worrying if your child is struggling to learn to read or write and this can sometimes lead to other difficulties such as changes in behaviour, emotional well-being and confidence. As a result, your child may need more reassurance than usual.

We know that pupils learn best when parents/carers and school operate in partnership. It is important that this relationship is maintained and is based on mutual respect and trust so that information can be shared and your child feels supported. It will be helpful if you can continue to talk with school staff about how you can support your child's learning at home.

It is common for pupils who struggle to read to be reluctant to engage in reading activities at home. As a parent/carer, it would be beneficial if you were to regularly read to your child using books of their choice, whatever their age, to help to foster an enjoyment of reading.

There are an overwhelming number of websites giving information and advice to parents of children experiencing literacy difficulties. As with any internet information, some sites are more useful than others. Information about how best to help your child to practise reading and writing skills is likely to prove most helpful.

2. My child cannot read. What is the problem?

There are many reasons why children struggle to learn to read but typically, these involve multiple factors that are likely to vary from one child to another and are usually impossible to fully identify in the case of a particular child.

When difficulties emerge, it is important that initial checks are made to ensure that there is normal hearing and eyesight. Having ruled out a sensory problem of this kind, the primary focus in addressing the difficulty should be upon the child's specific language and literacy skills and their attitudes and motivations to reading and schooling more generally.

If your child is not progressing in reading, a detailed reading assessment is required to establish what particular skills have been learnt and where there may be gaps in knowledge and understanding. This will provide important information to enable an appropriate intervention to be put into place. Such assessment should not be a one-off event but, rather, the child's needs should be regularly monitored and reviewed. The Essex Accuracy and Fluency Assessment of Literacy Skills (AFALS) may be used, and further recommended detailed reading assessments for schools to use are in the Essex Ordinarily Available resource and the Essex Recommended Assessments for Identifying Needs.

3. My child can read fluently but really struggles to spell. What can schools do?

Some children learn to read but can find spelling difficult. This is because reading and spelling involve different skills. A detailed spelling assessment will enable schools to identify the specific areas of spelling that require intervention. The Essex Accuracy and Fluency Assessment of Literacy Skills (AFALS) may be used, and further recommended detailed spelling assessments for schools to use are in the Essex Ordinarily Available resource and the Essex Recommended Assessments for Identifying Needs.

We use different skills to spell words: spelling by remembering the whole word and how the word looks (sight word approach), spelling by sounding out the different sounds in the word (phonemic approach), and spelling by using the meanings of different parts of the word's structure (morphemic approach). A school-based assessment would determine whether an intervention is needed in any of these areas, or in generalising spelling skills into independent writing. These interventions would then need to be regularly reviewed and refined if necessary.

4. My child says that when the school uses beige coloured paper it makes the words easier to read. Why is this?

Some children who struggle with reading report experiencing visual discomfort or distortions due to the light reflected from written materials. Children who struggle with reading may be more susceptible to visual stress as they need to focus on the text more than fluent readers.

The use of coloured lenses, coloured overlays and using different colour paper have been recommended by optometrists to reduce the visual stress and make reading words less uncomfortable. However, visual sensitivity is not the cause of severe reading difficulty and there is no high-quality research evidence to support a relationship between the use of these visual interventions and reading gains. In order to improve reading, the focus needs to be on implementing specific reading interventions (as outlined in Section 7 above).

5. Does my child need extra time in GCSE exams in school?

Schools need to comply with The Joint Council for Qualifications regulations. When applying for access arrangements (e.g. extra time, a reader, a scribe), the school needs to demonstrate evidence of the 'learning difficulty' outlined in assessment completed by a qualified assessor. The focus of evidence is on test scores meeting the threshold for specialist arrangements rather than any diagnoses. Schools also need to demonstrate that there is a history of need, including evidence of the support provided and evidence of persistent difficulty over time.

6. Does my child need an EHC plan?

The majority of pupils' literacy needs can be met within the resources and support services available to the school via SEN Support. Very occasionally, concern about a child or young person's literacy attainment and progress continues despite a rigorous Assess, Plan, Do, Review framework that incorporates advice and recommendations from specialist support services. In such cases, further

assessment can be requested from the Local Authority through an Educational Health and Care needs assessment (EHCNA), in line with the SEND Code of Practice.

7. Does my child need to be tested for dyslexia?

The most important thing is that your child's literacy difficulties are identified and recognised as early as possible and that the school responds using a structured 'assessment through teaching' approach that includes effective teaching methods to improve the targeted skills. Essentially, it is about working out exactly what your child can't yet do and helping them to learn it.

There is no scientific difference between what some people call 'dyslexia' and what others call 'severe and persistent literacy difficulties' or other such terms. There is therefore no universally agreed testing or assessment approach for identifying whether a child/young person has a condition described as dyslexia or might develop such a condition.

The usefulness of dyslexia screening tests has long been questioned (e.g. Rose, 2009, p.43⁴¹): *"In general, evaluations of screening tests for dyslexia indicate that they do not predict later reading difficulties very well; other measures such as letter-knowledge and measures of phonological processing skill are, arguably, much better predictors. Most screening tests also produce high numbers of false positives and false negatives."*

As noted above (in section 8 of this Practice Guidance), identification of dyslexia does not provide meaningful information about the cause of the difficulty, what intervention should be used, or indicate the rate of progress that a child/young person is likely to make.

In school, using assessment for intervention is the most appropriate means to identify any child who may be struggling with their reading and writing skills, and identifying the most appropriate course of action.

8. Why do some professionals identify dyslexia and others don't?

Some teachers with additional qualifications and some Educational Psychologists are involved in identifying dyslexia. However, Essex Local Authority is persuaded by research evidence that the reliability and validity of such identification, and its limited value for guiding intervention, are such that its educational value is limited.

Professional reports are most useful when they provide a detailed assessment of specific literacy skills and make specific evidence-based recommendations that the school can then use to address the difficulties. At the same time, this type of information can be effectively provided by school staff.

9. Is this Practice Guidance saying that dyslexia does not exist?

Severe and complex difficulties in acquiring literacy skills clearly do exist. Our position, however, is that the term dyslexia is not particularly helpful in our goal of meeting the needs of all pupils with literacy difficulties in Essex.

This Practice Guidance is based upon an understanding that, in order to address literacy difficulties, the most effective approach is to use assessment that leads to

specific and detailed descriptors of the individual's particular literacy skills (reading accuracy, reading fluency, comprehension, spelling and writing), in order to deliver effective interventions for them. It is about working out exactly what that child/young person can't yet do and helping them to learn it.

10. My child has been identified as having dyslexia. What will the school do?

Schools need to look at any reports and assessments alongside the school assessment data to identify all areas of literacy that need to be addressed. This can then inform classroom planning and teaching and indicate whether a specific intervention is needed. Any teaching and intervention should be evidence-based and include the principles and practical implications detailed in Appendix 2.

Professional reports that are most useful for addressing literacy difficulties are those that include a detailed assessment of literacy skills and specific evidence-based recommendations that the school can use to address the difficulties, and in secondary schools, provide information that all subject teachers can take into account when teaching the other areas of the curriculum.

11. Does my child need to be taught by a specialist tutor?

Pupils with literacy difficulties require structured, focused and evidence-based interventions that are regularly reviewed and refined based on the pupil's progress (please refer to Appendix 2 for more details). These interventions are delivered in school, and if difficulties are persistent, schools should consult specialist support services, such as Essex Educational Psychologists or Inclusion Partners, for advice, guidance and/or training on refining the intervention.

Some specialist teachers or tutors have an additional qualification in work with children experiencing literacy difficulties. These teachers typically have extra training and expertise in assessing literacy skills, and planning and delivering bespoke interventions. At the same time, as noted above, the most appropriate techniques used to teach reading to children identified as having dyslexia, are the same as those used to teach any other struggling reader,⁴² and can be provided by all teachers, with appropriate training. Advice and training are available from Essex SEND Services and should be sought when required.

12. Are severe and persistent literacy difficulties/dyslexia hereditary?

There is evidence that literacy difficulties can occur within families over many generations. This phenomenon, however, does not enable us to predict with any certainty which children and young people will develop literacy difficulties and need additional intervention. The key requirement is that the progress of all developing readers is closely scrutinised from a young age and appropriate intervention put in place when needed.

13. Are literacy difficulties included in the Equality Act 2010?⁴³

A person has a disability under the Equality Act if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse impact on their ability to carry out normal daily activities. Evidence of a long-term difficulty with literacy which impacts on a person's day-to-day life in a substantial way, would give protection under the Equality Act. There is no specific reference to any named condition or diagnosis within the Equality Act, and no requirement for there to be identification of any particular recognised condition in order to obtain protection under the Act.

Appendix 1. Areas of literacy assessment and corresponding intervention

Area of concern identified	Recommended focus of the intervention
Word reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis – this is a phonological skill (i.e. children or young people do not look at print) and refers to a child or young person's capability to hear individual sounds and put them together to make words. • Systematic phonic intervention that focuses on the most frequently occurring grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) in written English. • Teaching children and young people to correct the pronunciation of words that have been decoded accurately but lead to a non-word pronunciation⁴⁴. • Sight vocabulary intervention that focuses on the most frequently occurring phonically irregular words. • Vocabulary knowledge. • Generalising reading skills to real books.
Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Reading to accuracy and fluency. • Oral language skills. • The following skills: literal, inference, summarising, simplifying syntactic and semantic complexities, critical skills, study skills. • The following knowledge: vocabulary, facts, reasoning skills, logic, schemata, syntax, specific topic knowledge.
Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segmentation - this is a phonological skill (i.e. children or young people do not look at print) and refers to a child or young person's capability to hear a word and separate it into the individual sounds. • Writing letters to dictation. • Phonic, whole word, morphemic spelling interventions. • Generalising spelling skills into independent writing/recording.
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter and number formation. • Word formation. • Writing sentences. • Oral language skills.

Appendix 2. Using the Assessment Through Teaching model to address literacy difficulties

Steps of Assessment through Teaching Framework In line with Code of Practice. ⁴⁵ See also One Planning Guidance on the Essex Schools Infolink.		Practical Implications
Step One ASSESS	Baseline literacy assessment	Ensure assessment includes a collation of the most recent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardised assessments (e.g. standardised or centile scores, reading ages); • Curriculum-based assessments (school assessment); • Skill-based assessments (e.g. <u>Essex Accuracy and Fluency Assessment of Literacy Skills</u>).
Step Two PLAN	Instructional content: Deciding what to teach	Organise whole class teaching so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is being taught is clear and purposeful; • Content is differentiated in line with all learning and language levels. Organise interventions so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurate assessment has been completed to identify the areas of literacy that need targeting; • The focus is on skills that are most useful and highly generalisable; • Skills that are readily confused are separated; • One skill is being identified to teach; • New skills are identified in order of priority and the most useful skills are taught first. Teach meta-cognitive skills so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children understand what is being taught and why; • Children can think and talk about their own learning and progress
Step Three PLAN / DO	Instructional delivery: Deciding how to teach	Organise whole class teaching so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable adjustments are in place to enable all students to access (read) and produce (write) the written word using alternative methods of reading and recording, as required. Whole class teaching is made explicit across the range of cognitive and linguistic skills through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear differentiation using relevant teaching aids; • Modifying the demands of the task to match need; • Direct instruction; • Use of questioning and feedback. Organise specialist interventions so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New skills are taught one skill at a time until they are mastered; • All skills are taught to high levels of fluency (practice); • New skills are taught directly and explicitly; • Skills are taught consistently in a range of contexts; • Old and new learning are mixed.
Step Four DO	Classroom organisation	Organise the learning environment so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All teaching staff are trained in determining what to teach and how to teach it; • Alternative methods for reading and recording are accessible; • Students are grouped amongst peers with a range of skill levels; • There are frequent opportunities for practice; • Teaching assistants and peers are used to the greatest effect.⁴⁶
Step Five REVIEW	Assess and evaluate learning	Ensure that the access to the curriculum is evaluated by assessing the effectiveness of the reasonable adjustments. Ensure that evaluation of learning through interventions includes assessment of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy, fluency and generalisation; • New and old learning; • Principles and methods associated with Precision Teaching. Ensure that children and young people are aware of their progress and the next steps in moving learning forward and support is given for building resilience in continuing to apply skills.

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