



# **Educational cost of dyslexia**

**Financial, standards and attainment cost to education of  
unidentified and poorly supported dyslexia, and a policy  
pathway to end the educational cost of dyslexia**

**Report from the All-Party Parliamentary  
Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs**

**October 2019**

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## **Additional information**

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# Sharon Hodgson MP

Chair, APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs

We need to do better for young people with dyslexia. The current system is, in practice, failing to identify and support those who need it.

In my role as Chair, I have the pleasure of seeing many young people with dyslexia go on to amazing careers, moving our country forward. Yet, our education system is often hindering rather than helping them do it.

This report outlines why it is essential we change our current approach and includes some suggestions of how to do it.

We can build an education system that identifies dyslexia early and supports it well, whilst saving money directly and through wider benefits to the economy.

# Helen Boden

CEO, British Dyslexia Association

We're throwing away dyslexia talent and there's no good reason why. It's costing us money, hurting businesses and leaving young people with fewer opportunities.

The British Dyslexia Association started in 1972. In 2019, diagnosis and support is the worst we have seen since the government first began funding dyslexia services in the 1980s.

The primary concern is this means young people with dyslexia are not being given the same opportunities as their peers to demonstrate their underlying potential and ability. This is particularly acute among those with parents or carers who cannot afford private diagnosis and support.

What makes this situation all the more frustrating is that it does not save the UK any money.

The Treasury is already spending vast sums on servicing the convoluted EHCP system.

The wider cost to our country through poorer than necessary educational attainment and behavioural issues is so large it is difficult to even begin to quantify.

We welcome the work of the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs to look at practical pathways to a system that makes diagnosis and support readily available on the frontline, and hope it begins a new era for young people with dyslexia in our country.

# Overview

## Executive summary of report

Between ten to 15 percent of people have dyslexia. This means that dyslexia is the most common specific learning difference, effecting between 6.6 and 9.9 million people in the UK and between 800,000 and 1.3 million young people in education<sup>1</sup>.

Whilst the law technically provisions for identification and support for dyslexia through the Equality Act (2010) and Children & Families Act (2014), in practice diagnosis is rarely an option for those who cannot afford to pay privately (currently, over 80 percent of people with dyslexia will leave school without diagnosis<sup>2</sup>) and support is inadequate or non-existent, with many parents or carers having to fight for months, sometimes years, for an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to get basic support.

In the UK today, despite dyslexia having no direct link to intelligence or poor behaviour, a young people with dyslexia's chances are dramatically worse than their peers without any SEN:

- A student with dyslexia or another specific learning difference (SpLD) is twice as likely to fail to achieve a grade 4 or above in English and maths at GCSE.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Based on UK population of 66.4 million and 2018 DfE figures for young people in education, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/719226/Schools\\_Pupils\\_and\\_their\\_Characteristics\\_2018\\_Main\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719226/Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2018_Main_Text.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> 1.82 percent of school aged children in January 2018 in England were identified as having any form of SpLD (DfE, 2018a) versus NHS (2018) data that dyslexia affects up to one in ten people.

<sup>3</sup> In 2017/18, 70.6 percent of children without an identified SEN secured grade 4 or above in maths and English GCSE. Yet, this figure falls to just 35 percent for pupil identified as having an SpLD. Research by Angela Thompson, PhD student, Coventry University (secondary research of DfE data).

- Dyslexia rates among university students are just five percent compared to ten to 15 percent in the general population.<sup>4</sup>
- A student with dyslexia is three and a half times more likely to be temporarily or permanently excluded<sup>5</sup> and youth offending institutes have dyslexia rates between 31 and 56 percent.<sup>6</sup>

Yet this is a totally preventable state of affairs. Evidence from the British Dyslexia Association to the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs is that with early diagnosis and appropriate support, the impact of dyslexia on a pupil's attainment and opportunities in life can be substantially reduced or removed.

This is supported by evidence in the recent Timpson Review of School Exclusions (2019). Pupils receiving SEN support are the most likely group to be excluded except for gypsy/Roma or traveller of Irish heritage, at 3.5 times higher than the general population rate. However, this drops significantly if a pupil with SEN is in receipt of an EHCP plan to 1.6 times higher than the general population, showing that when appropriately supported as directed by the Children & Families Act 2014, it is effective.

Furthermore, there is an increasing weight of evidence that the strengths of dyslexia can bring real advantages in the right environments:

- The creative sectors have many fold the number of people with dyslexia than in the general population, for example the highly competitive Royal College of Art reports that 29 percent of its students have dyslexia<sup>7</sup> compared to five percent across higher education<sup>8</sup>.
- 40 percent of self-made millionaires have dyslexia<sup>9</sup>, around three or four times the level in the general population.

This report outlines the current state of affairs and a practical approach to improve outcomes for young people with dyslexia in the short and medium term.

<sup>4</sup> Based on UCAS data and analysis showing that in 2018 241,585 young people gained a place at university. Currently the 5 percent of HE students are dyslexic (Academic Attainment in Students with Dyslexia in Distance Education, 2015, John T. E. Richardson) versus ten to 15 percent in the general population (British Dyslexia Association, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Timpson Review of School Exclusions, 2019

<sup>6</sup> 52 percent, Morgan, 1997. 40-50 percent, Klein, 1998. 31 percent, Davies and Byatt, 1998. 31 percent, Alm and Andersson, 1997. 41 percent, Jensen et al, 2000. 50 percent, Kirk and Reid, 2001. 50 percent, Svensson, Lundberg and Jacobson, 2001. 56 percent, BDA, 2004

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/rebalancing-dyslexia-and-creativity-rca/>

<sup>8</sup> Academic Attainment in Students with Dyslexia in Distance Education, 2015, John T. E. Richardson

<sup>9</sup> 2003 survey of 300 British self-made millionaires commissioned by BBC2 for Mind of a Millionaire

The proposals are designed to be cost effective and offset by savings in the EHCP system, spending on specialist consultancy and indirect savings to the country such as improved behaviour in schools, higher educational attainment and more employable education leavers.

# Background

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning difference that brings both positive and negative characteristics.

The reason it is called specific is because it only impacts on certain areas of an individual, rather than being a general learning difference that has an impact on all areas of someone's cognitive performance.

## **It occurs independent of ability and socio-economic background**

There is no connection between dyslexia and intelligence. Dyslexia occurs across all sectors of society.

## **A different way of processing information**

Research tells us that dyslexia stems from differences in the way that the brain processes certain sorts of information, particularly, it is thought, language-based information.

The key point here is that it is these physiological differences in the brain that lead to the challenges that individuals with dyslexia experience, it is not lack of ability, poor parenting or poor education.

Essentially there is an underlying cause. All too often, however, the indicators of dyslexia are written off or attributed to other more negative behavioural or personality traits.

## **Every individual is likely to be different**

As human beings we are all different. Whilst there may be some commonalities associated with dyslexia, each individual is likely to be different. People are shaped not just by their dyslexia but by personality, experiences, parents or carers, environment and numerous other factors.

Therefore, it is not possible to provide a full-proof template of support. Each individual should be treated as an individual and the support tailored to meet their individual needs.

## **Dyslexia quite often co-occurs with other SpLDs**

It is not unusual for dyslexia to co-occur with other SpLDs such as attention deficit disorder (ADD), developmental coordination disorder (commonly known as dyspraxia), autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), dyscalculia, or speech, language and communication difficulties.

## **Incidence rate and heritability**

It is estimated ten percent of the population have dyslexia. This rises to 15 percent when co-occurrence is included. Statistically, this makes dyslexia the highest incidence SpLD.

Dyslexia is genetic in origin and therefore is inheritable. This inheritable factor should also be considered as it can mean that the parents or carers of pupils with dyslexia may also have experienced or still be experiencing similar difficulties to their children.

# Part one

Current system for supporting young people with  
dyslexia and its cost

# Education system

## Current support for young people with dyslexia

Whilst current legislation in theory provides good support for young people suspected of having dyslexia, in practice, support is poor or non-existent.

### How does legislation support and recognise dyslexia currently?

There are a number of pieces of legislation and government publications that relate to dyslexia. These are:

- **The Equality Act 2010:** This means that dyslexia is legally a disability. The act does not mention any disability specifically by name but accompanying guidance and case law affirm that dyslexia is encompassed by the act.
- **The Children & Families Act 2014:** This act legislates for support for young people with dyslexia in education.
- **The SEND Code of Practise 2014:** Statutory guidance for organisations that work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities.

Current legislation requires a compulsory SEN awareness course as part of ITT, this is normally under a day's training covering all SEN. Evidence from the British Dyslexia Association is this would not equip teachers to identify signs of dyslexia or support it in a classroom setting.

### Current quality of provision<sup>10</sup>

As of March 2019, 82 of the 152 local areas have been inspected and have received an “outcome letter” detailing their performance in implementing the SEN reforms. Five more are awaiting the result of their inspection.

<sup>10</sup> Evidence provided by SEN Legal to the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs in March 2019.

Local area SEN inspections aren't like school inspections, there's no grade from outstanding to inadequate. But in **40 of the 82 local areas - nearly half of them - inspectors found performance poor enough that they invoked their most serious sanction**, instructing the local area to submit a written statement of action (WSOA), a plan showing how council and NHS leaders are going to improve the service.

Inspection outcomes are getting worse over time. In 2016's inspections, 25 percent of local areas were told to write a written statement of action. In 2017, 51 percent of local areas had to submit one. And in 2018, nearly 60 percent of local areas inspected had to put a WSOA together. There's not a clear reason why, but it's highly likely that inspection standards have risen since the first visits in 2016.

## Diagnosing dyslexia

The evidence provided to the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs is that it is extremely unlikely for a school to provide a diagnostic assessment for a young person suspected (whether by the school or parents or carers) of having dyslexia. Almost always the parent or carer will have to pay between £500 and £700 to have a diagnostic assessment done privately before even beginning the process of accessing specialist support.

This is reflected in the fact that **over 80 percent of young people with dyslexia are not identified at school.**<sup>11</sup>

## Specialist support in schools

If a young person with dyslexia is lucky enough to be among the less than one in five who have a formal diagnosis, then it is far from given that they will receive specialist support at all or to an adequate level.

Whilst the Equality Act 2010 and the Children & Families Act 2014 provides a clear onus on schools to adequately support a young people with dyslexia, specialist support is routinely cut, rationed or removed to help the education systems meet budget demands.

<sup>11</sup> 1.82 percent of school aged children in January 2018 in England were identified as having any form of SpLD (DfE, 2018a) versus NHS (2018) data that dyslexia affects up to one in ten people.

Examples of barriers that are put in place to try and stop young people with dyslexia receive the specialist support they are entitled to include<sup>12</sup>:

- Schools telling parents or carers that their child needs to be at least two years behind their peers for attainment levels of literacy. This is not the case in law, the Children & Families 2014 act has no such stipulation. This delays the process and immediately removes those children who whilst people with dyslexia are working extremely hard to keep up. Equally it discriminates against those parents or carers who are able to supplement school education through home-based support.
- Schools carrying out “assessments” without the specialist knowledge required and then providing parents or carers with inaccurate information.
- Schools telling parents or carers that the local authority (LA) will not recognise dyslexia and therefore, will not provide any support for it.
- Schools refusing to accept the findings of diagnostic assessments carried out privately and also refusing to implement support recommendations that have been made by specialists.

## Education, Health and Care Plans<sup>13</sup>

In some cases, appropriate support can be negotiated between parents or carers and schools, but all too often, an agreement cannot be reached. In this case, an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is the only route that gives a legal guarantee of appropriate support, so this is often the route parents or carers are forced to take.

The legal provision for EHCPs is laid out in the Children & Families Act 2014.

This is the process as it should work:

- A parent or carer or school can request an EHC Needs Assessment.
- It takes six weeks to get a yes or no decision.
- If the LA say yes, they do their assessment.
- Up to ten weeks later they make a decision whether or not to issue a plan (week 16).

<sup>12</sup> Evidence from the British Dyslexia Association to the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs

<sup>13</sup> The information provide in this section is based on evidence from SEN Legal and the British Dyslexia Association.

- If they agree, you get a plan four further weeks later (week 20).

There are usually 36-39 teaching weeks in a school year, so if it works as laid out in the Children & Families Act 2014 then it will take just over half a school year to get support appropriate to the young person's dyslexia.

The reality is it takes a lot longer. At every stage they could say 'yes' or they can say 'no' and if they do say 'no', for a parent or carer to appeal, it takes 12 weeks. Therefore, **any form of appeal will inevitably take the process to over year**, during which time the child will not have appropriate support and will hence be missing out on education.

Most LA's will refuse the initial application (at week six) requiring a parent or carer to appeal to the SEND Tribunal.

The SEND Tribunal can take up to 12 weeks from registration to hearing. Generally, these appeals are conceded early on. Anecdotal feedback is that LA's just like to see which parents or carers enforce their rights.

Generally, the LA will agree to issue a plan (avoiding a second appeal but not in every case).

Often, however, when parents or carers get their final plan, it will be substandard, and they will have to appeal that (a third appeal). A common example of this is they may accept the diagnosis, but refuse to include dyslexia as a SEN in Section B of the EHCP or refuse specialist dyslexia teaching in Section F.

Therefore, every time a parent or carer appeals it lengthens the process by 12 weeks. So a minimum of 36 weeks, but in reality, far longer as parents or carers, or the LA would have to gather evidence. It often falls to the parents or carers to do this to ensure the quality of this evidence.

For parents or carers who can challenge their rights legally, the law and timescales are clear and set out, and they can force the LA to comply with correspondence. The difficulty is with parents or carers who are on their own, who may also be have dyslexia, have limited funds and cannot challenge the LA delays. For those parents or carers, even getting an agreement to do an EHC Needs Assessment can take over a year. **Those parents or carers are sometimes fighting for three years**

**to achieve what a legal representative could do in 20 weeks.** Parents or carers really are struggling in this area.

Therefore, the system is socially unjust, those who can afford legal representation are far more likely to have a faster, efficient and successful journey than those who can't.

LAs are frequently gate keeping. Examples of this include<sup>14</sup>:

- They say they have no educational psychologists available and parents or carers need to wait for the assessment of the child. Parents or carers can pay for the assessments they need if the LA cannot provide them and then claim the costs of this if successful, but this is a financial gamble that many parents or carers simply cannot afford. You could potentially be looking at not just a dyslexia assessment but a paediatrician, speech and language, psychiatrist/mental health practitioner in order to support the case. **Each of these if done privately would be a substantial cost, very conservatively well over £1,000 in total.**
- Parents or carers are often told by schools, who are implementing LA policy, that their child needs to be significantly behind their peers before being considered eligible for assessment, this can be as much as two years behind. If progress following any intervention is seen, then it is deemed to be successful and they go back to the start of the “needing to fail significantly” again process. This is in fact not the case in law at all. Children do not need to fail, the Children & Families Act 2014 takes account of the needs of children who may be achieving but has difficulty that is greater than their peers - “Section 20, 2 (2)A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she—(a)has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age.”

There's also a disparity in outcomes by region. London and the East Midlands have performed relatively well in these inspections, but outcomes in Yorkshire and the North East have been much poorer. Again, it's not exactly clear why, but it's notable that many inspections in the North have been led by Ofsted's most experienced and capable SEN specialists.<sup>15</sup> It could also be linked to higher levels

<sup>14</sup> Evidence from the British Dyslexia Association to the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs

<sup>15</sup> Evidence from the British Dyslexia Association to the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs

of social deprivation and therefore the inability of parents or carers to be able to afford legal representation.

## Educational cost

### Impact of undiagnosed and poorly supported dyslexia

Whilst it is hard to pinpoint the exact cost that undiagnosed or poorly supported dyslexia has on our education system, there are some clear costs - financial, attainment and standards - that must be considered when deciding on a better way to support young people with dyslexia.

Based on what we know, measures to improve diagnosis and support for dyslexia would bring long term savings.

In this report, we do not deal here with the indirect emotional and psychological cost to individuals and their families of dyslexia, this has been addressed in our report the [Human Cost of Dyslexia](#) that was published in April 2019, and following this report, the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs will consider evidence around the cost to society more broadly.

### Attainment and standards

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“Children only have one chance in education, I want to make sure that chance works for them.”

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for  
Education, 2019

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Whilst financial cost is an important factor in decision making around how to support young people with dyslexia, the significantly poorer results of young people with dyslexia and far higher incidents of disruptive behaviour - despite dyslexia not being directly related to intelligence, behaviour or mental health - have to be considered a reason for investment if a pathway to change these outcomes can be demonstrated.

A student with dyslexia or another SpLD is twice as likely to fail to achieve a grade 4 or above in English and maths at GCSE.<sup>16</sup>

The 2019 [Timpson Review of School Exclusions](#) looked extensively at the likelihood of a young person with SEN being excluded versus their peers in the general population in concluding they are among most problematic groups, “Children with some types of SEN [dyslexia being one], boys, those who have been supported by social care or are disadvantaged are all consistently more likely to be excluded from school than those without these characteristics.” The report went on to say:

- 78 percent of permanent exclusions issued were to pupils who either had SEN, were classified as in need or were eligible for free school meals.
- More than half (61 percent) of parents and carers of pupils who had been excluded who responded said their child had SEN.

Pupils receiving SEN support are the most likely group to be excluded, other than gypsy/Roma or traveller of Irish heritage, at 3.5 times higher than the general population rate. This drops significantly if a pupil with SEN is in receipt of an EHCP plan to 1.6 times higher than the general population, showing that when appropriately supported as directed by the Children & Families Act 2014, it is effective.

This problem goes on to impact after young people leave school. Whilst between ten to 15 percent of the general population have dyslexia, only five percent of the university population have dyslexia.<sup>17</sup> The gap in attainment also remains. Around

<sup>16</sup> In 2017/18, 70.6 percent of children without an identified SEN secured grade 4 or above in maths and English GCSE. Yet, this figure falls to just 35 percent for pupil identified as having an SpLD. Research by Angela Thompson, PhD student, Coventry University (secondary research of DfE data).

<sup>17</sup> Academic Attainment in Students with Dyslexia in Distance Education, 2015 by John T. E. Richardson.

40 percent of students with dyslexia achieve a 2.1 or above, compared to 52 percent of students without dyslexia.<sup>18</sup>

## Cost to individuals

Whilst it is not a cost to the education system directly, it is worth noting some of the cost to young people with dyslexia and their families:

- It costs between £500 and £700 for a diagnostic assessment for dyslexia, which is needed to access specialist dyslexia support, and is only paid for by schools in very rare cases.
- If a parent or carer needs to provide evidence for an EHCP process because the LA refused to do so or puts in place impractical delays, this can cost hundreds if not thousands of pounds more for a paediatrician, speech and language, psychiatrist/mental health practitioner in order to support the case.
- A 2019 survey for APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs found that 47 percent of parents or carers of a child with dyslexia spend over £1,000 per year more on them compared to a child without dyslexia.<sup>19</sup>
- If a parent or carer uses legal support for the EHCP process, it can cost in the tens of thousands of pounds, and often this is not recoverable even if they are successful.<sup>20</sup>

In April 2019, the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs published the [Human Cost of Dyslexia](#) looking at the emotional and psychological impact of growing up with dyslexia on individuals and their families.

<sup>18</sup> Academic Attainment in Students with Dyslexia in Distance Education, 2015 by John T. E. Richardson.

<sup>19</sup> Research developed for the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs. Distributed through social media (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn). Over 1,300 responses were received. Survey participants were self-selecting and in addition to answering short, closed questions relating to their experiences of dyslexia, they were also able to write open-ended comments giving more detail, in their own words - in excess of 2,500 comments were received. The survey ran between 7 February 2019 and 18 March 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Evidence from British Dyslexia Association to APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs

## **Part two**

**Current system for supporting young people with  
dyslexia and its cost**

# Policy pathway

## Ways to improve diagnosis and support

Understanding around dyslexia and how to support young people with dyslexia is excellent. It is perfectly possible for the difficulties dyslexia presents to be managed and not inhibit someone's opportunities, or result in behavioural or mental health issues.

The proposals we lay out here range from those that can be done overnight to those that will take a few years and careful consideration. However, none are new or controversial, they are all well established with long-proven efficacy. In relative terms, they are all also small investments considering that there are a million young people in education with dyslexia<sup>21</sup>, and the benefits are rapid and substantial.

### **Immediate ways to improve outcomes for young people with dyslexia**

The education system is loaded against young people with dyslexia in some very simple ways that Department for Education, if it wished to, could change with little or no impact to the general population. Including:

- Remove spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) marks from tests other than English Language GCSE.

<sup>21</sup> Between 10 to 15 percent of people have dyslexia. This means that dyslexia is the most common specific learning difference, affecting between 800,000 and 1.3 million young people in education. Based on 2018 DfE figures for young people in education, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/719226/Schools\\_Pupils\\_and\\_their\\_Characteristics\\_2018\\_Main\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719226/Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2018_Main_Text.pdf).

- Allow young people with dyslexia to use laptops/tablets in all classes and all exams, including English Language GCSE. (Schools can do this easily, they just often don't.)
- Allow for the spelling, punctuation and grammar checking facility on laptops/tablets to be enabled in all exams apart from GCSE English Language.

## **Medium term ways to improve outcomes for young people with dyslexia**

Dyslexia requires additional support and at the moment, the reason the system is failing is because that support is not there quick enough or in a great enough quantity. There are two ways in which support needs to be provided:

- A Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor in every school.
- Training on dyslexia during ITT and as part of CPD (particularly compulsory CPD about dyslexia for NQTs).

# Removal of spelling, punctuation and grammar marks<sup>22</sup>

Pragmatic approach to measuring SPaG skills

In 2011, the coalition government announced the return of spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) marks on many GCSE and A-Level exams.<sup>23</sup>

Whilst, given the volume of communication that is written, it is important to assess a young person's English language ability - which is done by the GCSE English Language exam - it seems disproportionate to penalise someone weak at spelling, punctuation and grammar on exams that are not primarily relevant to these. An employer or university interested in a young person's spelling, punctuation and grammar can look at their GCSE English Language result and if they are interested in their ability in say history they can look at their results in GCSE or A-Level History.

The system further penalises young people with dyslexia who use an amanuensis:

- Students who dictate their answers are eligible for marks awarded for grammar. This is a third of the total marks awarded for SPaG.<sup>24</sup>
- Students who dictate their answers and indicate punctuation are eligible for marks awarded for punctuation and grammar. This is two thirds of the total marks awarded for SPaG. The cover sheet must indicate that both punctuation and grammar were dictated.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Developed with evidence from Dr Amanda Hipkiss and British Dyslexia Association

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/end-for-gcse-modules-and-spelling-punctuation-and-grammar-marks-restored-to-exams>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/special-requirements/access-arrangements/spelling,-punctuation-and-grammar-marks>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/special-requirements/access-arrangements/spelling,-punctuation-and-grammar-marks>

- Students who dictate their answers, indicate punctuation and spell out every word are eligible for all SPaG marks. The cover sheet must indicate that spelling, punctuation and grammar were dictated.<sup>26</sup> (It should be noted this is in practice impossible.)

This means in practice, a young person with dyslexia who uses an amanuensis will miss out on two thirds of the possible SPaG marks available.

As the GCSE English Language exam provides universities and prospective employers a clear indication of someone’s spelling, punctuation and grammar ability (if this is a factor they wish to consider) then there is no great value in having SPaG marks across most exams.

However, removing SPaG marks in exams other than English Language GCSE would allow young people with dyslexia to demonstrate their ability in that subject unfettered by irrelevant factors.

With SPaG marks making up around five percent of the total marks available, removing SPaG marks could in many cases move someone weak in spelling, grammar and punctuation up to the next grade boundary.

## **Background**

The focus on SPaG marks reappeared in 2010 when the then Shadow Education Secretary Michal Gove gave a speech arguing for a requirement that examinations have ‘a set number of marks for correct spelling, punctuation and grammar’.

Under the coalition government, this was then reinforced by the DfE’s and Ofqual’s requirements for reformed GCSEs, which were translated into examination specifications.

SPaG marks are based on writing standard English. The criteria divides the marks available into “high performance”, “intermediate performance” and “threshold performance”, with an additional “below” level.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.aqa.org.uk/exams-administration/special-requirements/access-arrangements/spelling,-punctuation-and-grammar-marks>

AQA specifications, for example, English Literature, History, Geography and Religious Studies specifications are required to specify SPaG marks. Students are awarded separate marks for SPaG in these subjects.

The DfE and Ofqual both specified that marks for SPaG in English Literature must be five percent of the total. There is no guidance for History, Geography or Religious Studies.

These are the marks available for SPaG in the JCQ mark schemes.

Subject	High performance	Intermediate performance	Threshold performance	Below the level required
English Literature	4	2 - 3	1	0
History	4	2 - 3	1	0
Geography	3	2	1	0
Religious Studies	3	2	1	0

SPaG marks are not awarded for all answers on every paper. For example, in AQA English Literature, only Section A questions of Papers 1 and 2 have SPaG marks. In History, Geography and Religious Studies, essay style answers are allocated SPaG marks.

In all cases, SPaG is completely separate from the rest of the mark scheme.

# Use of laptops and tablets

## Exams reflecting the workplace

When was the last time you hand wrote something more than some notes to yourself for work? When was the last time you asked someone to? When was the last time you heard of this happening?

Laptops and tablets are the standard medium of written workplace communication today. Yet, we subject young people with dyslexia every summer to doing a handwritten GCSE English Language paper.

It makes no practical sense and it means that thousands of young people with dyslexia receive GCSE English Language grades that do not reflect accurately their English language skills in a modern context.

Allowing anyone who wishes to use a laptop (with the adequate anti-cheating provisions enabled) in a GCSE English Language exam has no drawbacks for universities or future employers but means that everyone's abilities to operate in today's communications environment are accurately reflected.

# **A Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor for every school**

Long-term strategy to effectively diagnosis and support

For £4,000 a teacher can be trained to diagnose and support young people with dyslexia. In almost all cases, these specialist teachers can provide excellent support without the need for the complexity and rigour of an EHCP.

If a strategic decision was made to adequately provide frontline dyslexia diagnosis and support in schools, evidence from the British Dyslexia Association indicates that the cost would be balanced out by savings later on.

It would also undoubtedly mean a massive reduction in emotional and mental health issues among young people with dyslexia and their families, better educational attainment, and a reduction in temporary and permanent exclusions.

## **What makes a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor special?**

A teacher wishing to become a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor able to support and diagnose dyslexia will need to complete a Level 5 programme to develop specialist teaching skills and then a Level 7 programme to develop a deeper set of teaching and assessing skills. These courses are available nationally through a variety of providers and delivered through a variety of methodologies from eLearning, to face-to-face sessions and blended learning.

During the Level 7 course, they will have to complete:

- 30 hours of one-to-one/small-group assessed teaching practice delivering specialist dyslexia support.

They will need to demonstrate expert and practical knowledge of:

- Current research underpinning contemporary theoretical explanations of the nature of dyslexia and other SpLDs, and their relevance for teaching and learning.
- Theory and practice of psychometrics and educational testing.
- The relationship of that theory to the assessment of cognitive strengths and difficulties of learners.
- The current legal and professional issues that affect learners with dyslexia.

They will be able to support with teaching in these ways:

- Conduct a full diagnostic assessment for dyslexia, gathering information from a range of stakeholders and assess using qualitative and quantitative tools.
- Produce comprehensive reports stating the strengths and challenges of the individual and the impact of these challenges on their learning, social and emotional development.
- Make specific recommendations for support in the classroom, for small groups and one-to-one intervention, as well as at home.
- Make specific recommendations for reasonable adjustments for examinations and assessments including access arrangements.

They will be able to support colleagues and parents or carers in these ways:

- Deliver specialist teaching on a one-to-one and group basis using a cumulative, structured, sequential, multisensory programme based on phonics and morphology.
- Appraise and advise on a range of evidence-based teaching and learning strategies and interventions in the classroom, with small groups and on a one-to-one basis.
- Deliver specialist support and advise others on the support required across the broader curriculum.

Be able to support colleagues and parents or carers by:

- Delivering staff training on early identification, strategies for support and how to create an inclusive curriculum.

- Provide advice, guidance and training to parents or carers.
- Provide advice and guidance to school senior managers on policy and best practice.

This is contrasted with a classroom teacher, who as part of initial teacher training would usually, at most, receive a brief, broad overview of dyslexia along with other SEN and is trained to teach at a whole-class level.

The National SENCO Award has enabled more SENCOs to broaden their knowledge of SEN. However, to cover all the needs that present within a mainstream school, the coverage is broad and brief, and there is no time to go into the detail of dyslexia.

The National SENCO award is a 60-credit course at master's level, covering a range of needs as well as outlining the full range of managerial and record keeping duties of a SENCO. This contrasts with a Level 7 Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor course that is a 120-credit course at master's level and is focused on dyslexia.

## **Responsibility of a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor**

Whilst all schools have a SENCO who has overall responsibility for SEN compliance, they are not necessarily dyslexia specialists and do not have capacity to diagnose, train or support.

Classroom teachers, if trained to Level 3, can make basic dyslexia interventions in a classroom setting and spot signs of dyslexia - but they are not able to develop support strategies, diagnose or train peers.

A Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor has multiple essential roles:

- **Diagnosing dyslexia:** Whilst a Level 3 trained classroom teacher can spot signs of dyslexia and with an additional day's training administer a basic screener that would show indications of dyslexia, all students with dyslexia need a diagnosis to understand their strengths and weakness, have a tailored support plan developed, and ensure they receive the full range of access arrangements available to them.
- **Advice to colleagues and parents or carers:** Dyslexia is complex and can mean that a classroom teacher and parents or carers are regularly out of

their depth when it comes to deciding on the best approach. A Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor needs to be available to advise.

- **Training classroom teachers:** All classroom teachers need at least one day's awareness training focused solely on dyslexia (ITT currently has around half a day covering all SEN) and those teaching literacy need a Level 3 in teaching pupils with dyslexia to be able to provide appropriate support. A Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor can deliver this training.
- **Direct support for complex cases:** Once a diagnosis and support strategy is developed by a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor most pupils can be supported in the classroom by an appropriately trained teacher with consultancy from a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor available as required. However, some more complex case of dyslexia benefit from regular one-on-one support from a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor.

## Number of Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessors needed

The British Dyslexia Association's evidence to the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs is that one Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor is needed per 500 primary school students or 1,000 secondary school students, which equates to approximately one FTE in every secondary school and one FTE for two average-sized primaries.

The reason for the higher ratio of Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessors to pupils in primary schools is that the volume of screening and diagnosis work should be much higher during primary years (ultimately, almost no students with dyslexia should be leaving primary school without a diagnosis) and the need for one-on-one or one-on-few literacy support is higher in primary.

Whilst work would need to be done with DfE to understand the specific budget needs, it is possible to loosely understand the size of investment needed for this approach.

With 5.5 million pupils in primary school in England and Wales and 3.8 million in secondary school and middle school<sup>27</sup>, this would mean around 15,000 FTE Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessors would be required.

<sup>27</sup> DfE, 2017

With a classroom teacher salary ranging between £24,000 - £36,000 and a SEN specialist expecting to receive an additional between £2,200 and £3,400 over a classroom role<sup>28</sup>, the cost would be somewhere in the region of £500 million per year.

Whilst this is a substantial investment (although only 1.2% of total spending on schools<sup>29</sup>), it resolves a substantial issue for the UK. A 2004 report put the cost of dyslexia to the UK at £1 billion per year.<sup>30</sup>

Presenting further savings to the UK, this would remove almost all need for young people with dyslexia to use the EHCP system and LEAs to provide diagnosis and specialist support or schools to buy in dyslexia training for classroom teachers.

With only thousands of qualified Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessors currently in the UK, a training drive would need to be funded. With it costing £4,000 to train a Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor, it would cost in the region of £50 million to fund the initial training wave<sup>31</sup>.

It would take two to three years for participants to become fully qualified.

As training can be done alongside a full-time role, funding would not need to be found to cover their salary whilst training. Additionally because the training is practical such “trainees” would be able to start implementing the skills and knowledge they are developing immediately.

Ongoing funding would need to be provided to bring on new Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessors as existing ones retired, changed roles or left the profession. This would need to be calculated with support from DfE.

<sup>28</sup> DfE, 2018

<sup>29</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/765908/LA\\_and\\_school\\_expenditure\\_2017-18\\_Text.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765908/LA_and_school_expenditure_2017-18_Text.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2004/sep/24/schools.uk1>

<sup>31</sup> Assuming training for around 12,500 teachers to Level 7

# Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor case study

Barton Hill Academy's successful adopt of model

Despite operating in the country's most challenging areas, Barton Hill Academy are in the top 20 percent of primary schools nationally and in the top two percent for schools with similar contextual settings - they attribute this to their approach to inclusion and dyslexia.

## About Barton Hill Academy

Barton Hill Academy is a large primary school with just under 700 pupils on roll. The school has a nursery, speech and language facility, and pastoral department. The school is part of the Academies Enterprise Trust and have been for seven years now.

Situated in Torquay, Devon, their catchment area includes families who experience deprivation, unemployment or low income, housing issues, and breakdown of family.

Parental engagement is an ongoing issue for the school for a number of reasons, one of the most significant being their own negative school experience. This means that, unfortunately, many parents or carers are lacking in confidence and perceived ability to support their own children in their learning. This often leads to avoidance and contributes to the perpetual cycle of learning differences impacting on a person's life choices and opportunities.

Barton Hill Academy is a flagship Inclusion Quality Mark school. This extends to having the highest expectations for children's progress regardless of barriers to learning. They have an ambition to exceed national progress, national standards at

all levels and maximise life opportunities for all pupils. This is particularly important in an area where less than a fifth of children progress to university.

Building on their wider commitment, the school has recently obtained British Dyslexia Association Quality Mark - a scheme to develop, maintain and recognise dyslexia-friendly schools.

## **Specialist teachers and support**

The school's SENCO, Angela Farrell, has encouraged the development of an in-house team of specialists responsible for leading the removal of barriers to learning - putting inclusion at the heart of our curriculum.

Kristen Kass is the school's Level 7 Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor. In addition, she is a nurture trained class-based teacher as well as attachment lead professional. The school also has a speech and language teacher and TA, a maths specialist, Reading Recovery teacher, and autism and pastoral lead.

They are supported by an educational psychologist. Additionally, many staff have completed training in child and adolescent mental health.

## **Results of approach**

The school's data highlights the progress children make in their time spent with them. Barton Hill Academy are in the top 20 percent of primary schools nationally and in the top two percent for schools with similar contextual settings according to Fischer Family Trust - yet their children come to them at some of the lowest levels.

Progress in reading and writing especially is well above the national figure for the third consecutive year, and exceptionally high for low prior attainment and pupil premium. SEN progress is also well above national figures for non-SEN.

## **Broad approach to teaching**

Barton Hill Academy support their pupils to achieve this by being proactive about the progress of each individual. Through termly pupil progress meetings, detailed transition meetings, individual learning plans (ILPs), specialist assessments and intervention, learning walks, lesson observations, book monitoring, quality CPD

including external visitors and training from within their academy and school on a weekly basis.

Supporting parents or carers is particularly important to them. Teachers make themselves available on a daily basis, welcome feedback, and have home school link workers who can help parents or carers with other issues and advise them on where to get support - providing them with a bridge at times between them and the teachers if needed.

## **Approach to dyslexia**

Barton Hill Academy ensure their learning environments are dyslexia friendly - uncluttered, well-organised, labelled resources, concrete resources accessible at all times, learning packs, a range of fonts for displays including open dyslexia fonts.

Children can use overlays, reading rulers, visual timetables, and reduction and removal where necessary of black on white for resources and displays. Strategies for processing speed, response time, brain and movement breaks, and organisational support is all factored in.

Lessons are differentiated according to individual need in terms of reading, comprehension and writing. Children are confident about the resources they can use to support them and where to access them. They also have access to different ways of recording - e.g, iPad apps, voice recording, computers, etc.

## **What helps pupils with dyslexia can help all pupils**

Importantly, anything they do that supports a learner with dyslexia will be of no detriment to any other learner - and may well in fact be beneficial. All of these are small tweaks that take very little time or effort and should form a part of quality first teaching.

The aim is to normalise learning differences. Everyone needs help with something and we can all learn differently, finding a range of things easy or challenging but that we can all learn. They emphasise that making mistakes is how we learn.

All of this takes a team effort, joined up thinking, information sharing and specialist support, as well as an ongoing training programme.

Kristen Kass, Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor, provides both TAs and teachers with training that includes the background to dyslexia and statistical data, the theories of dyslexia, how it may present and the broadness of the spectrum. Her training stresses that each child is different and must have a tailored response, not blanket intervention.

## **Role of the Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor**

Following pupil progress meetings led by SMT, monitoring reading and spelling ages and studying each child's attainment levels provision maps are put in place. Led by SENCO Angela, the specialist team look at each child in the school and set down the support needed from social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) to EHCP, educational psychologist involvement and in-house assessments. Angela then meets with teachers to discuss implementation of provisions and monitoring arrangements. From here, ILPs are written, which include termly targets for each child - these are discussed with parents or carers and children and their views taken into account.

Specialist Dyslexia Teacher Assessor Kristen then assesses those identified. The school is not able to run diagnostic assessments for dyslexia, so over the years they have tried many different ways. They currently use the Dyslexia Portfolio. Kristen gathers as much information as possible when carrying out these assessments in addition to test scores. They also use the British Dyslexia Association checklists for class teachers to build a fuller picture.

What they can do from there is create an action plan tailored to each child, which may include phonics assessment and precision teaching, activities to strengthen working memory, realistic expectations set for written work, extra time, processing considerations, maths support, Rapid Reading, comprehension support, alternative ways of recording and consideration of co-occurring difficulties.

Kristen then goes through this with class teachers, providing resources, help, advice, and they arrange to meet with parents or carers. They can then add information to the profile and often mention trouble with homework and behaviour at home, which we can help with. Their policy is not to say specifically that they are dyslexic but that they show signs consistent with dyslexia, and that we will support them as such.

These action plans are monitored regularly and changes made as needed as well as updated assessments as they move further through the school.

Since beginning the British Dyslexia Association Quality Mark process, they have refined their practise further and use checklists in nursery and reception to record early signs and concerns.

## **Managing behavioural issues**

Behaviour is in itself a communication and at times, the first indicator a teacher or parent or carer may see is dysregulation and emotional outbursts as a way to avoid situations and mask weakness.

Early assessment is key here before learnt behaviour becomes ingrained and gaps in learning widen. Self-esteem can be hugely affected and have a very negative impact. It is vital to ensure children with dyslexia have a positive image of themselves, aim high, have aspirations and know they can achieve them.

She has seen the frustration of parents or carers of children attending other schools who have likened trying to get help to banging their head against a brick wall. Many have been told they will have to pay for private assessments, that the school doesn't have anyone who knows about dyslexia or have been 'fobbed off'. This really shouldn't be the case anymore.



The [British Dyslexia Association](#) provides the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs. For more information please contact [policy@bdadyslexia.org.uk](mailto:policy@bdadyslexia.org.uk).

**British Dyslexia**  
Association