

Identifying learning difficulties arising from Dyslexia

From The Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia (2001)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. It sets out a model for the assessment of such difficulties, beginning at age 3 and extending through formal schooling. The assessment model is underpinned by the following general principles:

- The purpose of assessment is to identify a child's learning needs and to make necessary adjustments to instruction;
- Informed teacher observation plays a crucial role in identifying children who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia;
- The early stages of assessment should be built on procedures outlined in the *Learning-Support Guidelines* ;
- A diagnostic test or a screening test for dyslexia should be administered if a learning difficulty emerges after formal reading instruction has begun;
- Parents should play a key role in the assessment of their child's learning difficulties, and in the implementation of appropriate interventions;
- Educational psychologists should play a key role in supporting class teachers/learning support teachers with the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and the development of appropriate intervention strategies, before referral for psychological assessment is considered;
- The formal identification of dyslexia should occur only after the student has been provided with appropriate learning support for at least one year, and the student's response to that intervention has been documented and evaluated;
- The formal identification of dyslexia should involve a multi-disciplinary team, including the student's parents and teachers, the principal teacher, an educational psychologist and other relevant professionals
- The formal identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should recognise the degree of difficulty being experienced by the student
- At second-level, the needs and progress of each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should be reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team soon after school entry and annually

thereafter, and appropriate recommendations should be made and implemented.

5.2 A Phased Process of Assessment

In this section, a four-phase model for the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia is proposed. Each phase of the model is viewed as lying along a continuum. The suggested age ranges are approximate. It is envisaged that movement from one phase to the next will be governed by the student's progress in attaining learning targets that have been set in the context of the modified learning environment designed to address the student's learning needs.

The overarching purpose of assessment at each stage in the model is to:

- identify the student's learning needs;
- make necessary adjustments to teaching;
- evaluate and record learning outcomes;
- determine the need for further assessment and intervention.

A key feature at each phase is the strong involvement of the student's parents and his/her class or subject teachers, as these play central roles in the student's development, and must support the implementation of any interventions that are needed.

The proposed model is summarised first, and then developed in more detail.

Together, the four phases represent a continuum, while there is also a continuum within each phase.

1. *Initial Identification of a Learning Difference (3-5 years of age)*. If observation by the child's teacher and/or parents indicates that prereading/emergent literacy skills are not developing along expected lines, the child's learning difference (i.e., a marked difference between expected and observed development) should be noted and appropriate adjustments should be made to instruction. If adjusted learning targets are not achieved, Phase 2 should be implemented.

2. *Identification of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (5-7 years)*. Once formal reading instruction has begun, teacher observation, evaluation of the outcomes of teaching, and, where necessary, screening and diagnostic testing, should be used to identify students who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. If a student is deemed to be at risk, an appropriate individual learning programme should be developed and implemented by the class teacher and/or the learning support teacher. Where necessary, additional input on such matters as the interpretation of test results, programme planning, and monitoring of progress should be provided by an educational psychologist. If learning targets are not achieved, then Phase 3 should be implemented.

3. *Identification of Dyslexia and Analysis of Learning Needs (Ages 7-12)*. A multi-disciplinary team, including the student's class teacher, the learning support teacher, an educational psychologist, and the child's parents/guardians should consider the student's learning strengths, his/her response to the instruction that has been provided to date, and the outcomes of any educational and psychological tests that have been administered. It is at this stage that a formal identification of dyslexia should be made, having regard to the student's needs and relevant criteria issued by the Department of Education and Science. The learning environment that is most appropriate to a student's needs should also be identified, and a detailed individual learning programme should be prepared (see

Chapter 6). The next phase, Phase 4, is relevant for most students who were in receipt of special education provision in Phase 3.

4. *Annual Review of Learning Needs (12 years+)*. The learning needs of individuals who were assessed as having dyslexia should be formally reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team when the student has been accepted by a post-primary school. A formal review should occur on an annual basis thereafter. Since students (over age 12) may not manifest noticeable learning difficulties arising from dyslexia until relatively late in their development as readers and writers, these individuals should also be identified and their needs addressed.

5.2.1 Phase 1: Initial Identification of a Learning Difference (Ages 3-5)

In the early stages of the child's development, when reading and writing skills are beginning to emerge (ages 3-5 years), and learning differences may manifest themselves, teachers and carers will need to monitor children's development carefully, and make appropriate adjustments as the need arises. Teachers working with young children may find it useful to record the outcomes of their observations using such tools as:

checklists (see Table 5-1);

- curriculum profiles;
- teachers' own tests;
- informal notes of observed response;
- samples of children's own work;
- parents' observations and comments.

In addition, it may be desirable to administer more formal tests such as:

- pre-reading inventories that assess concepts of print;
- tests of early phonological skills.

Table 5-1

Indicators of a Possible Learning Difference (Ages 3-5 Years)

Many of these indicators may also be noted in children with learning differences not arising from dyslexia.

- Is later than most children in learning to speak
- Has difficulty pronouncing some, especially multi-syllabic, words
- Has difficulty separating spoken words into sounds and blending spoken sounds to make words (i.e., has difficulty with phonological awareness)
- Experiences auditory discrimination problems

- Is prone to spoonerisms (eg., fips and chish for fish and chips)
- Has difficulty with rhyming
- Has difficulty maintaining rhythm
- Is unable to recall the right word
- Is slow to add new vocabulary
- Exhibits delays in acquiring emergent literacy skills (e.g., understanding that written language progresses from left to right, discriminating between letters, words and sentences)
- Experiences problems learning the alphabet
- Has trouble learning numbers, days of the week, colours and shapes
- Has trouble learning to write and spell his/her own name
- Is unable to follow multi-step directions or routines
- Is developing fine motor skills more slowly than other children
- May have difficulty telling and/or retelling a story in correct sequence.

If a marked difference between expected and observed development manifests itself in this early phase of learning to read, the class teacher should consult with the child's parents and with other professionals in the school and the community, to identify appropriate adjustments that need to be made to the child's learning programme at home and at school. In school settings, the learning-support (remedial) teacher will be an important source of information and support. In some cases, help with programme planning may be sought from an educational psychologist or from a speech and language therapist. Children who do not respond following appropriate adjustments may include those who are at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia.

A strong focus on prevention of learning problems between ages 3 and 5 may result in the identification of some 'false positives' – children who may be identified as being at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and may not develop such difficulties over time. Nevertheless, it is possible to prevent or at least minimise the effects of learning difficulties by providing appropriate interventions at this stage. The main approach should be 'when in doubt act'.

To facilitate the involvement of parents in helping to identify learning differences, it is important to make general information about literacy development available to them. Such information could be provided in pre-schools, schools and health clinics in the form of short leaflets outlining key developmental milestones in literacy acquisition, and indicating to parents what they should expect at each milestone.

Another factor that is particularly relevant to this phase is class size. Quite clearly, teachers of very large reception classes might be unable to differentiate teaching in the manner proposed here, and maintain relevant documentation.

Therefore, current Department of Education and Science policy, which favours relatively small reception classes, should be observed.

5.2.2 Phase 2: Identification of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from

Dyslexia (Ages 5-7 Onwards)

As children move beyond the pre-reading/emergent literacy phase, and are exposed to more formal reading instruction (ages 5-7 years), some will continue to be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, while others may exhibit difficulties for the first time. It is important to identify these children at this phase so that appropriate intensive early intervention can be put in place.

Such intervention typically involves establishing and addressing learning targets that reflect the student's areas of greatest need, and may include small-group or individual instruction. Research indicates that the vast majority of students whose learning difficulties are identified at an early stage can make considerable progress if intervention is timely and appropriate.⁶⁵

The *Learning Support Guidelines* provide a model for the early identification and remediation of learning difficulties. This model can be extended to address the needs of all students with learning difficulties, including those arising from dyslexia. This model emphasises the need for class teachers and learning support teachers to work co-operatively in addressing students' learning difficulties at this critical early stage. The following activities are proposed:

- Monitoring/observation/evaluation of the student's progress in the class reading programme;
- Diagnostic assessment by the class or learning-support teacher once low achievement or a learning problem had been identified;
- A review, by the class teacher and learning support teacher, of the outcomes of the diagnostic assessment, and any additional assessment information that is provided by the class teacher;
- Consideration of the most appropriate interventions for the student (i.e., intervention by the class teacher, provision of learning support by the learning support teacher; and/or intervention at home by parents);

65 e.g., Vellutino, F.R., Scanlon, D.M., & Lyon, R.G. (2000). Differentiating between Difficult-to-Remediate and Readily-Remediated Poor Readers. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 33, 223-238.

- Development of an individual learning programme by the learning-support teacher, in consultation with the class teacher and the student's parents.

The programme should include measurable learning targets and the attainment of those targets should be reviewed at least twice a year;

- Involvement of the students' parents and class teacher in the assessment process and in the implementation of the child's learning targets.

The model is designed to accommodate the needs of all students with learning difficulties, including those at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. At this stage (Phase 2), it is proposed that intensive support (i.e., supplementary teaching) be provided by a learning support teacher for at least one year to students who are at risk. It is on the basis of the student's progress in

Phase 2 that a decision may be taken to proceed to Phase 3, where a formal assessment of the student's learning difficulties and instructional needs is made by a multi-disciplinary team.

Diagnostic tests can be particularly useful to teachers in identifying students' learning strengths and weaknesses in various skills associated with acquiring literacy. One particular group of diagnostic tests – those that are designed to identify children who are at risk for dyslexic difficulties – may be particularly useful.

Among the skills and learning processes that are typically measured by such tests are:

- Letter name knowledge;
- Word reading;
- Non-word reading;
- Phonemic awareness (including alliteration, rhyming etc.);
- Naming speed;
- Phonics;
- Reading fluency;
- Spelling;
- Auditory verbal memory;
- Auditory discrimination;
- Motor skills.

In using and interpreting screening tests for dyslexia, the following points should be kept in mind:

- Each screening test is based on a particular view of what dyslexia is and on how best to intervene in the child's learning;
- Screening tests differ from each other in terms of the skills and processes that are assessed;
- Few screening tests offer intervention programmes linked to test results;
- Screening tests will identify some children who are at-risk for dyslexia and who, subsequently, may not develop learning difficulties arising from dyslexia (false positives);
- Screening tests administered at 5-7 years will not pick up all children who are at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia (false negatives).

Table 5-2

Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia

(Ages 5-7+)

- Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other possible learning difficulties.
- Is slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds (alphabetic principle)

- Has difficulty separating words into sounds, and blending sounds to form words (phonemic awareness)
- Has difficulty repeating multi-syllabic words (e.g., *emeny* for *enemy*; *pasghetti* for *spaghetti*)
- Has difficulty decoding single words (reading single words in isolation)
- Has poor word-attack skills, especially for new words
- Confuses small or 'easy' words: *at/to*; *said/and*; *does/goes*)
- May make constant reading and spelling errors including:
 - Letter reversals (e.g., *d* for *b* as in *dog* for *bog*)
 - Letter inversions (e.g., *m* for *w*)
 - Letter transpositions (e.g., *felt* and *left*)
 - Word reversals (e.g., *tip* for *pit*)
 - Word substitutions (e.g., *house* for *home*)
- Reads slowly with little expression or fluency (oral reading is slow and laborious)
- Has more difficulty with function words (e.g., *is*, *to*, *of*) than with content words (e.g., *cloud*, *run*, *yellow*)
- May be slow to learn new skills, relying heavily on memorising without understanding
- Reading comprehension is below expectation due to poor accuracy, fluency and speed
- Reading comprehension is better than single-word reading
- Listening comprehension is better than reading comprehension
- Has trouble learning facts
- Has difficulty planning or organising
- Uses awkward pencil grip
- Has slow and poor quality handwriting
- Has trouble learning to tell the time on an analogue clock or watch
- Has poor fine motor co-ordination

In interpreting the outcomes of such tests, care should be taken to separate judgements about 'at risk' learners from judgements involved in the identification of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. Care should also be exercised in making categorical statements about a child's neuro-psychological functioning based on the outcomes of a screening test.

Once a student has been identified as being at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and a suitable learning programme has been put in place (for example, additional support from the student's own teacher, or a combination of additional support), it will be necessary to continue to monitor the student's learning and to evaluate the overall effects of the programme.

This can be accomplished if the class teacher and/or learning-support teacher:

- monitor the student's progress from day to day in such areas as phonological awareness, word recognition, spelling and reading accuracy, fluency, rate and comprehension of continuous prose;
- administer or re-administer appropriate diagnostic tests at the end of each instructional term;
- consult with other professionals and with the student's parents to obtain additional information about the student's learning needs and progress.

Since decisions about provision of supplementary teaching by a learning support teacher are made at the school level, it is not necessary to involve the Department of Education and Science or the National Educational Psychological Service Agency, though advice from a psychologist may be sought. Schools can take decisions regarding the duration and intensity of learning support, and can demonstrate flexibility in meeting the needs of students. However, as indicated in the *Learning Support Guidelines*, the provision of learning support places certain obligations on the school and on teachers in such areas as:

- provision of differentiated instruction;
- provision of one-to-one supplementary teaching, where needed;
- liaison with parents and with other professionals;
- programme planning at the individual student level;
- formal review of progress at least twice a year.

According to the *Learning Support Guidelines*, in selecting students for supplementary teaching, schools should give priority to students achieving at or below the 10th percentile on nationally standardised measures of reading achievement. In some cases, schools may not have the capacity to provide learning support to all the students who need it, particularly if one or more students require one-to-one learning support (supplementary teaching). As indicated in Chapter 4, it may be necessary to provide some schools with an additional learning support position, or additional learning support hours, if current resources do not meet students' learning needs.

5.2.3 Phase 3: Formal Identification of Dyslexia and Analysis of Needs

(Ages 7-12 Onwards)

While many students will respond positively to the adjusted class teaching and supplementary teaching that may be provided between the ages of 5 and 7 years, a small minority will continue to struggle because of their learning difficulties arising from dyslexia. A student who has not made adequate progress over a period of at least one year, despite having been provided with intensive learning support based on an appropriate individual learning programme, will need to have his/her progress and learning needs reviewed by a multidisciplinary team that includes parents, class teacher, learning-support teacher, principal teacher (who should chair the team), educational

psychologist and other relevant professionals. The purpose of this review is to examine the severity of the student's learning difficulties arising from dyslexia and his/her response to instruction, and to consider what future provision should be made.

The multi-disciplinary team's review of the student's progress and learning needs should be comprehensive and should include the following:

- a consideration of the outcomes of tests administered by the student's class teacher and/or learning support teacher, including the student's assessment profile;
- a review of the student's response to interventions that have been implemented by the class teacher, learning-support teacher and parents; the student's individual learning programme and progress records would be particularly important in this regard;⁶⁶
- a consideration of the effects of the student's learning difficulty on his/her motivation and self-esteem;
- a consideration of the outcomes of any tests administered by the psychologist, including ability tests;
- a consideration of any other learning difficulties affecting the student's development.

An important element of the review is a consideration of the student's ability. As stated in Chapter 3, it is expected that this should consist of the student's fullscale IQ score, until such time as an appropriate, alternative measure of ability has been identified, and can be used in the identification process.

The outcomes of the review should result in:

- a determination of the severity of the student's learning difficulties, with reference to criteria provided by the Department of Education and

Science;

- an indication of the level and intensity of the intervention that is desirable in the short-term;

⁶⁶ The development of an Individual Profile and Learning Programme, and a Weekly Planning and Progress Record is outlined in the Department of Education and Science's *Learning-Support*

Guidelines

- a determination of the student's ability to learn a language other than the first language;
- a recommendation relating to the nature and context of the instruction that should be provided and the expected duration;
- a determination of the involvement of other professionals;
- the development of a comprehensive individual learning programme;
- the determination of a date on which the student's progress will be reviewed.

Table 5-3

Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (Ages 7-12+)

Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other learning difficulties.

- Has continued difficulty reading text aloud or silently
- Reading achievement is below expectation
- Still confuses letter sequences (e.g., *soiled* for *solid*; *left* for *felt*)
- Is slow at discerning and learning prefixes, suffixes, root words and other morphemes as part of reading and spelling strategies
- Poor reading accuracy, fluency, or speed interferes with reading comprehension
- Spelling is inappropriate for age and general ability (e.g., spelling the same word differently on the same page, use of bizarre spelling patterns, frequent letter omissions, additions and transposition)
- Poor spelling contributes to poor written expression (e.g., may avoid use of unfamiliar words)
- Uses avoidance tactics when asked to read orally or write
- Experiences language-related problems in maths (e.g., when reading word problems and directions, confuses numbers and symbols)
- Is unable to learn multiplication tables by rote
- Still confuses some directional words (e.g., left and right)
- Has slow or poor recall of facts
- Lacks understanding of other people's body language and facial expressions
- Has trouble with non-literal or figurative language (e.g., idioms, proverbs)
- Forgets to bring in or hand in homework
- Has difficulty remembering what day or month it is
- Has difficulty remembering his/her own telephone number or birthday
- Has poor planning and organisational skills
- Has poor time management
- Lacks self-confidence and has a poor self-image

The nature of the provision that is recommended (e.g., learning support, resource teaching support, enrolment in a special class or school) depends on the severity of the student's learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, and a consideration of the setting in which those difficulties can best be addressed.

5.2.4 Phase 4: Annual Review of Learning Needs (Age 12 Onwards)

This section proposes strategies for meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in post-primary schools.

Recognised Difficulties Arising from Dyslexia.

Prior to a student's entry, representatives of the post-primary school (e.g. the head of first year and the learning support teacher) should liaise with the incoming student, his/her parents, and representatives of the feeder primary school to discuss the student's future educational needs and to receive the elements of the student's records that are deemed appropriate. This procedure is designed to help the transfer of students from primary to post-primary level and to ensure the continuity of appropriate provision.

For students who were identified in primary school as having a specific learning difficulty arising from dyslexia, there should be a formal, multi-disciplinary review of progress and learning needs on an annual basis. These reviews should involve the student's year-head, learning-support/resource teacher, guidance counsellor, an educational psychologist (if necessary), parents, and an advocate (if desired), and should result in the development of individual learning programme that addresses such issues as:

- the severity of the student's learning difficulties;
- how the student's current needs can best be met, through, for example:
 - provision of instruction in basic skills
 - development of study skills and examination techniques
 - reduction in number of subjects taken
 - provision and use of assistive technology;
- whether or not the student should be exempted from learning a language other than his/her first language;
- the modifications and accommodations that subject teachers need to make to ensure that the student has access to the curriculum in their subjects;
- the effect of the learning difficulty and any resulting under-achievement on the student's motivation and self-esteem, and proposals for building motivation and self-esteem;
- any accommodations that may need to be made in school and state examinations (with reference to current criteria;)
- any accommodations that need to be made in the home to address the student's learning difficulties;

Table 5-4 Indicators of a Possible Learning Difficulty Arising from Dyslexia (12 Years+)

Many of these indicators may also be noted in students with other learning difficulties.

- Is still reading slowly and without fluency, with many inaccuracies

- Misreads words (e.g., hysterical for historical) or information
- Has difficulty modifying reading rate
- Has an inadequate store of knowledge due to lack of reading experience
- Continues to experience serious spelling difficulties
- Has slow, dysfluent and/or illegible handwriting
- Has better oral skills than written skills
- Has difficulty planning, sequencing and organising written text
- Has difficulty with written syntax or punctuation
- Has difficulty skimming, scanning and/or proof-reading written text
- Has trouble summarising or outlining
- Has problems in taking notes and copying from the board
- Procrastinates and/or avoids reading and writing tasks
- Does not complete assignments or class work or does not hand them in
- Is slow in answering questions, especially open-ended ones
- Has poor memorisation skills
- Still mispronounces or misuses some words
- Has problems recalling the names of some words or objects
- Has poor planning and organisational skills
- Has poor time management skills
- Has more difficulty in language-based subjects (e.g., English, Irish, History) than in non-language based subjects (e.g., mathematics, technical graphics)
- Lacks self-confidence and has a poor self-image

Unrecognised Difficulties.

Post-primary schools need to be alert to the possibility that some students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia may enter such schools before such difficulties have been formally identified. While such students may have received an appropriate education, there is an increased risk that their needs may not have been fully addressed. It is further noted that some students with dyslexia do not present with learning difficulties until their post-primary schooling begins. An early recognition system should be in place in all post-primary schools. This should consist of some or all of the following:

- Close liaison with feeder primary schools and transfer of primary records to post-primary schools;

- Information gathered from parents of incoming students;
- Achievement and ability testing prior to or on entry;
- Diagnostic testing for any student whose achievement is unexpectedly low relative to his/her ability.

If evidence of learning difficulties arising from dyslexia emerges there should be an assessment of the student's ability by a psychologist, and a formal, multidisciplinary review of the student's learning needs, involving the psychologist, the student's year head, guidance counsellor, subject teachers (e.g., the English teacher) and learning support teacher. The review should examine the student's progress in school, and the outcomes of any tests that have been administered, including tests of achievement and ability, in the context of agreed identification criteria (see Chapter 4). If the review confirms that the student's difficulties are particularly severe, an individual educational plan should be prepared.

Table 5-5

The Task Force recommends that:

- The identification of dyslexia should be based on the phased model outlined in Chapter 5 of this report, and should culminate in a review of the student's learning needs by a multi-disciplinary team drawing on the outcomes of ability and achievement tests, and information on the student's response to planned changes in his/her class and learning support programmes. [R9]
- For each student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia who is in receipt of learning support, the student's class teacher, learning support teacher, and parents should work jointly on the preparation of an individual learning programme designed to meet the student's needs, and should review its implementation at least twice a year, as outlined in the *Learning Support Guidelines*. [R49]
- Each primary and post-primary school should involve parents of students with dyslexia in the assessment of their child's learning needs, in the development and implementation of an individual learning programme and in making decisions on continuation/discontinuation of support services. [R40]
- Where special education provision is being considered for a student with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, the student's class/subject teacher and learning support teacher should, along with parents and other relevant professionals, participate in the multi-disciplinary review of the student's learning needs, and should contribute to the development of the student's individual learning programme. [R53]

5.3 Matching Level of Support to Learning Needs

An important principle underpinning the phased model of identification and provision (Table 5-5) is that the level of support provided to a student should match his/her learning needs. This implies that students with the greatest learning needs at a particular phase should receive the most intensive levels of support.

In Phase 1, where the emphasis is on identifying learning differences, and adjusting instruction for those children who exhibit such differences, intervention will be provided by the care-giver or class teacher who will 'notice' and 'adjust' teaching according to the child's emerging needs.

In Phase 2, by which time formal reading instruction has begun, students who may be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are identified, using a combination of teacher

observation and diagnostic reading tests. In this phase, the students with the greatest difficulties may require supplementary teaching from a learning-support teacher, with advice being provided by a psychologist if required. Children with less severe difficulties may receive additional support from the class teacher, with, perhaps, advice from the learning support teacher or an educational psychologist. The level of support that a student receives throughout this phase will be linked to his/her response to the interventions that are provided, as learning targets are set and reviewed on a regular basis. Access to learning support may be governed by the criteria set down in the School Development Plan.

It is at Phase 3 that a formal identification of dyslexia may be made following a consideration of the student's achievement and abilities, and his/her response to interventions. The student's level of need, with respect to agreed criteria, will again dictate the nature and quantity of support that is provided. For students with severe learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, special education provision may be warranted. This may take the form of resource teaching, enrolment in a special class for students with specific learning difficulties in a mainstream school, or enrolment in a special school for students with specific learning difficulties.

For students in Phase 3 whose learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are not severe, or for whom placement in a special education setting is not desirable, supplementary teaching may be provided by a learning-support teacher, as outlined in Phase 2. Again, the level of support will be dictated by the student's needs. Students whose difficulties are quite severe may need intensive, one-to-one supplementary teaching. Others may work successfully in larger groups, with appropriate support from the class teacher and from their parents. Students whose learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are not severe may need additional support from their class teachers. Decisions relating to this matter can be taken without reference to circulars.

Finally, in Phase 4, when students will normally be attending a post-primary school, the level of support that is provided will again be linked to the student's learning needs, which should be reviewed on an annual basis. Students whose difficulties are very severe, and who were in receipt of special education services at primary level, may again be provided with intensive support at post-primary level, by a resource teacher, or a learning-support teacher, if such support is deemed to be warranted. Students with less severe difficulties may be provided with some additional instruction in areas linked to their needs – for example, organisational skills, study skills, and skills related to preparation for examinations.

5.4 Record Keeping

A comprehensive assessment record should be maintained in respect of each student who is judged to be at risk of developing learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, or who has been assessed as having such difficulties. In primary schools, this record will initially be maintained by the student's class teacher; and later on, by the learning support teacher, or by another teacher designated by the

Principal Teacher. This record should be passed on to the student's post-primary school, and should be maintained there by a teacher designated by the principal teacher. The record is may take on added importance if, in the future, access to special education services and other provision for students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia are based on evidence from the school about the student's response to the instruction that has been provided.

When the student has learning difficulties arising from dyslexia, his/her record should include:

- Class teachers' reports on the student's progress in class, including the student's response to any modifications in instruction;

- Results of screening tests, diagnostic tests and other measures administered by the student's class and/or learning support teachers;
- Individual profiles and learning programmes prepared by the student's class and/or learning support teachers, including evidence on whether or not specified learning targets had been met;
- An individual educational plan, as outlined in the *Learning Support Guidelines*, that specifies how the student's needs will be addressed in class, learning support and/or special education settings;
- Reports on psychological assessments;
- Student's work samples (writing samples etc.);
- Other relevant information.

At post-primary level, the student's record should include:

- A summary of the student's progress in primary school, including any interventions made to address his/her learning difficulties arising from dyslexia;
- Reports from subject teachers on the student's progress;
- An individual educational plan indicating the school's response to the student's learning difficulty (see Section 5.2.4, this chapter);
- Information on the status of the student with regard to exemptions from the study of Irish;
- Information on reasonable accommodations provided or sought for in school and state certificate examinations;
- Work samples provided by the student, under examination conditions;
- Other relevant information.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The class/subject teachers and learning support teachers of students with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should maintain appropriate records on any formal or informal tests that have been administered, and on the students' responses to any interventions that have been put in place, with a view to making such information available to a multidisciplinary review team as the need arises. [R52]

5.5 Development of Assessment Instruments

A number of difficulties with the use of current assessment tools were referred to in submissions to the Task Force, or were pointed out by members of the Task Force. These difficulties include:

- no Irish norms for many of the test instruments in general use, including ability tests (such as the WISC-III battery) and individually administered tests of English reading;
- no recently developed standardised, norm-referenced tests of reading in Irish;
- no Gaeltacht norms for commonly used tests in English;

- lack of suitable tests for children of the travelling community seeking to access special education services for students with specific learning difficulties.

Given the importance of the principles of equity and non-discrimination in the provision of educational services, the Task Force recommends that the

Department of Education and Science, in partnership with other relevant agencies, should commission the development of assessment instruments appropriate to the needs of students whose first language and/or main language of instruction is Irish so that learning difficulties experienced by these students can be identified and addressed on the same basis as students whose first language is English. The Task Force also holds the view that, in the context of an increasingly multi-ethnic society, the cultural appropriateness of testing materials in English for students with learning difficulties should be carefully considered, and some measure of flexibility introduced, lest these children be placed at a disadvantage in accessing the support they may need.

The Task Force recommends that:

- The Department of Education and Science should commission the development of assessment and support materials in Irish so that the needs of students' whose first language is Irish can be effectively addressed. [R21]
- In the context of an increasingly multi-ethnic society, the Department of Education and Science should consider the cultural appropriateness of testing and teaching materials in English for students with learning difficulties. [R22]
- The Department of Education and Science should provide guidelines to learning support and resource teachers in Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileann on the language through which additional support should be given in those cases in which the language of the home is different from the language of the school. [R23]

5.6 Identification of Individuals with Dyslexia Outside the School System

Several submissions to the Task Force raised the matter of the identification of individuals with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia outside of the formal school system. These included individuals in programmes for early school leavers, students in third level institutions, and adults and prisoners in literacy programmes. Although the matter of identifying individuals with dyslexia outside of the school system did not fall under the terms of reference of the Task Force, it is the view of the Task Force that the general procedures outlined in this chapter can be applied to the identification of persons with learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in non-school populations. The conclusion that an individual has learning difficulties arising from dyslexia should be drawn after:

- appropriate diagnostic assessment has been conducted before and after implementation of an individual programme designed to address the learner's needs;
- the outcomes of instruction have been carefully monitored, including outcomes resulting from modifications to the learner's programme, in line with need;
- a formal review of the learner's progress and needs has been conducted by a team of experienced literacy instructors following implementation of an appropriate, intensive programme for a specified period of time.

Source URL: <http://www.sess.ie/node/843>