

School-Based Assessment

Schools should establish a structured policy of school-based testing in order to identify and monitor the progress of pupils with special educational needs. This structure should include the training of key personnel, agreed procedures for selecting the tests, deciding when to administer, managing the data and acting on the results.

1. Early Screening Tests

Pupils with possible learning difficulties and special educational needs should be identified and assessed as early as possible. The earlier that action is taken, the more responsive the pupil is likely to be. To assist with early identification, use can be made of formal tests. There are numerous tests which can help teachers to identify factors thought to facilitate or hinder progress in learning literacy. In particular, recent research establishing the importance of early phonological development suggests that any early screening should include a look at phonological skills.

Base-line assessment gives a picture of the pupil's development and learning when they start school and helps in planning appropriate teaching and learning experiences.

Standardised tests are extensively used in schools for screening. A wide range of tests is available, so care should be taken in selecting a test appropriate to the age and ability of the pupils. In order to provide continuity of assessment a whole school policy on annual screening should be established. The assumption is that the screening will detect both avoidable cases of potential literacy difficulty and remediable cases of actual literacy difficulty. (LINK: See List of Tests in the Library Section)

2. Diagnostic Assessment

Further diagnostic assessment may be necessary where a pupil has been identified as possibly having specific difficulties. Diagnostic assessment can provide a profile of the pupil's strengths and weaknesses and enable the development of an individual educational plan appropriate to the pupil's needs. However, scores obtained from a diagnostic assessment often have limited psychometric validity as the content of each test is dependant on the specific theories of the test constructors as to what factors cause a specific learning difficulty.

Diagnostic tests are available as packages such as the widely-used, but now dated Aston Index or the Dyslexia Screening Test or as diagnostic tests tapping one specific element associated with dyslexia, e.g. the Non-Word Reading Test or the Phonological Assessment Battery.

Diagnostic tests may also be used to assess progress in the mastery of specific skills such as

- letter name knowledge

- word reading ability
- non-word reading ability
- phonemic awareness
- naming speed
- phonic knowledge
- reading fluency
- spelling skills
- auditory verbal memory
- auditory discrimination skills
- motor skills

(LINK : See List of Tests in The Library section)

3. Assessing / Monitoring Progress

The testing of literacy skills is no more than the careful sampling of some important aspects of a pupil's reading-related behaviour. This assessment can be done informally through a teacher's observation or more formally. There is a wide range of objective standardised tests that may be used to measure progress in literacy development. (LINK: See List of Tests in The Library section). Both formal and informal monitoring of reading-related behaviour are important and are not mutually exclusive.

Results are more reliable when more than one test is given and attainment is measured by a composite score.

The teacher, who is interested in the diagnosis and treatment of reading difficulties, should ask a number of related questions including:

1. What exactly is the pupil's difficulty?
2. What could be causing the problem?
3. Can anything be done to help the pupil overcome the difficulty?
4. Specifically what can I do to help the pupil?
5. How effective is the help given?
6. How adequate was the original diagnosis?