

Talking to schools about your child's dyslexia

The role of the parent

You will be aware of your child's difficulties in the classroom. If you can describe all the difficulties (special educational needs/SEN) that you think your child experiences, you are quite likely to reach some agreement with the school.

There may well be disagreement as to **why** your child has these problems or **what** to do about it, but the evidence of the difficulties is hard to deny.

The **Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2014** (SEND Code of Practice) states in Chapter 6, Section 6.14 "**The benefits of early identification are widely recognised – identifying need at the earliest point and then making effective provision improves long-term outcomes for the child or young person.**"

The SEND Code of Practice also states in Chapter 6, Section 6.20 "**In particular, parents know their children best and it is important that all professionals listen and understand when parents express concerns about their child's development.**"

Describing the special educational needs

A dyslexic child will have special educational needs in some of the following: reading, writing, spelling and numeracy, with possible deficiencies in working memory, sequencing, phonological awareness, visual perception and organisation skills. He or she may well have additional problems with self-esteem, social skills, behaviour, motor skills and spoken language.

The definition of special educational needs is a learning difficulty that calls for special educational provision to be made. Once it has been established that your child has special educational needs, school governors have a responsibility to make sure the school does its best to provide the right sort of help.

If you have any worries about your child's progress at school, you should not hesitate to talk to the class teacher. It is best to put all your questions and points in a letter to the school. It will help the teacher to be clear about your worries and will make sure that everything you want to talk about is recorded.

Use the questions overleaf to help you describe your child's difficulties and their impact on his or her learning. This should enable you to have constructive discussions with the school.

Special educational provision

Once your child's difficulties are agreed, you can discuss with school the appropriate provision that should be put in place.

If you are doubtful about the value of the suggested provision, you can ask: 'Why do you think that strategy will be effective?' or 'What progress do you expect him/her to make as a result?'

Finally, it is important to keep the lines of communication open between yourself and the school. Suggest arranging a date for a follow-up discussion before you leave.

A sample letter

Dear **[Teacher/Headteacher]**

I am concerned that my child seems to be having difficulty with learning and may have a special educational need. I would like to meet with you to discuss this and what the school can do to help.

The questions I would like to discuss are... ..
[List your questions]

The points I would like you to know about are...

[List all your points in note form eg:

- 1. " Child's Name" cannot spell or read very well**
- 2. I noticed this last year and told Mrs]**

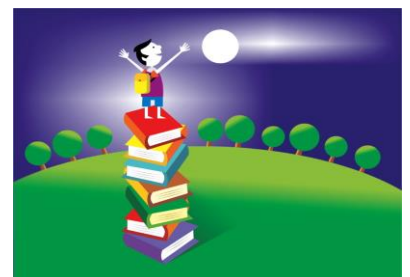
Please pass on my request for my child's school record to the chair of governors. I should also like to see a copy of the school's special needs policy.

I am available for a meeting... .. **[Give dates].**

I would like to bring a friend with me. **[Give your friend's name]**

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



*Guidelines on the changes to the new SEND Code of Practice 2014 can be accessed via the following link:-
http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/files/dyslexiaaction/guide_to_help_parents_and_carers_navigate_the_changes_in_special_educational_needs_and_disability_provision.pdf

Questions to ask yourself about your child's difficulties **(for convenience, the child is referred to as 'he' throughout)**

Reading

- What happens when your child can't read a word? Does he guess wildly or attempt to work it out? How successfully?
- In continuous reading, does he make errors, eg miss words, miss syllables (beginning, middle or end)?
- Can he read for information, eg a bus timetable; a computer game manual; a TV guide?
- Can he read his own writing?
- Can he remember what he has read? Can he remember or understand a sentence, a page, a chapter?
- Does he seem to be concentrating on decoding?
- What strategies does he use to avoid reading?
- What help does he need? What helps at home, if anything? (eg If I read the text book to him, he can do the homework.)

Writing

- How does he hold a pen? Are there motor control problems?
- Is handwriting unusually big/small?
- Is it legible, if you discount spelling?
- Is it erratic (eg starts off neat but becomes untidy as thinking about content takes over)?
- Does he write slowly? How much does he write?
- Is he better on a word processor?
- What help does he need?
- What helps at home? Does he dictate or use a word processor.

Organisation

- Does he have difficulty planning?
- Are there any signs of panic, eg about not knowing where to start?
- Does he have avoidance strategies?
- Does he forget what he is doing?
- Does he carry everything around in his school bag because he doesn't know

what he needs when? (Note – untidy bedrooms are normal!)

Spelling

- What sort of errors does he make?
- Are words spelled as they sound? If not, what is the logic behind the attempt?
- Can he spell if he concentrates on single words, but cannot recall words for continuous writing?
- What about the content, if you discount the spelling and presentation?
- What help does he need?
- Are there any strategies you use at home for learning spellings?

Maths

- What sort of errors does he make?
- Are there any everyday examples, eg with money?
- Is it a reading problem or a copying one?
- Is it a sequencing or ordering problem, eg does he forget processes half-way through?
- Is it a memory problem, eg tables?
- Is it a conceptual problem, eg spatial awareness?
- Are the problems different, eg is geometry (shapes) better than arithmetic?
- What sort of help does he need?
- Is there anything that works?

Memory

- How does he cope with being given instructions or remembering messages?
- Is there any difference between verbal or written instructions?

Don't forget to describe any problems with:

behaviour, confidence and self-esteem;
motor skills, eg clumsiness;
speech or language skills, eg remembering the word he wants to say.