

Informing the Debate: Educational support for dyslexia.

Briefing paper for Parliamentary Debate 14-12-11

Build and support a knowledgeable workforce

The most important thing for assuring appropriate identification and support for young people with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties is ensuring the education workforce has the right levels of knowledge and skills.

With the new policy of devolving funds to schools LA SEN teams across the country have been or are being dispersed. Significant numbers of trained, experienced specialist teachers have lost their jobs. Parent organisations are noting the loss of these specialist skills is making it increasingly difficult to get recognition, assessment and appropriate guidance and support for dyslexic-SpLD learners. What is happening on the ground flies in the face of what the government is trying to achieve.

All teachers should be trained to understand dyslexia, its impact on learning and what constitutes dyslexia friendly practice. Teachers should be aware of when to signpost learners for assessment and when to provide appropriate intervention.

Initial Teacher Training course providers should be required to deliver mandatory and consistent dyslexia awareness sessions. The mandatory minimum should be the existing Department of Education 2005 module; available to view at <http://nso.archive.teachfind.com/node/175600>.

This is currently the subject of an e-petition: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/20674> . This petition has the support of all of the major dyslexia organisations.

Schools can use the Dyslexia-SpLD Professional Development Framework developed by The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust. This free, online tool provides a roadmap to specify what is needed to help all teachers, from initial teacher training through to those seeking to become specialist teachers. Here schools can evaluate their workforce skills and knowledge and identify key areas for further professional development.

This tool also enables the SENCo to undertake a needs-analysis relating to Dyslexia-SpLD skills and knowledge in their schools, providing a personalised report, including key documents, teaching resources and workplace activities to support ongoing professional development. It consists of six strands, including Language and Literacy; Theories of Dyslexia and Supporting the Dyslexic Learner. It can be

accessed on:

<http://www.thedyslexiaspldtrust.org.uk/professionaldevelopmentframework/>

Phonics Check

With the new Phonics Check it is essential that teachers understand the implications for children failing, with clear signposts to next steps and appropriate support where needed. We are very keen, along with our other partners in the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust to help with this advice.

Changes to JCQ regulations

Along with our professional colleagues in the field, we share concerns in regard to the impact of recent changes to access arrangements. The changes made when this latest revision to the regulations was drafted have had a number of consequences which were perhaps unexpected but are potentially unfair. We wish to work closely with the JCQ and other dyslexia organisations to assure the reliability and transparency of the examinations system while also ensuring fair and appropriate support for dyslexic-SpLD learners. We agree that further dialogue is needed to improve the regulations for the future.

We believe it is always important to stress that providing the right levels of support are key to success for dyslexic-SpLD learners. Access arrangements are one tool to assist learners to demonstrate in examinations what they know, understand and can do. We are concerned this key point is often overlooked.

Important questions to address,

- What mechanisms will be put in place for children who 'fail' the phonics test at 6?
- With the elimination of school action and school action plus, what mechanisms will be put in place for others identified as experiencing SpLD/dyslexia for follow-up assessment, support with termly monitoring of progress and adjustments as appropriate,?
- What steps will be put in place so schools can effectively manage appropriate support?

We at Patoss, with our colleagues in the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust, want to be involved and informed about the shaping of the initiatives proposed (eg. for skilling up the teaching workforce, supporting early identification of literacy difficulties), so we can signpost people effectively, but also to ensure quality of information/training.

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