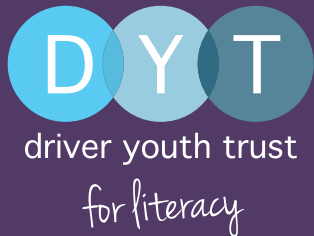


# Driver Youth Trust: the first ten years

Bringing children with  
literacy difficulties into  
the education equation

Cath Murray



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# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the staff, schools and supporters of DYT over the past ten years. This book speaks about many individual efforts, but at the end of the day DYT is a team effort and we would like to acknowledge each and every one of you.

# Introduction

**The Driver Youth Trust (DYT) has matured in the ten years since it was founded from a grant-awarding fund to a full-blown charity that develops programmes, conducts research, supports schools to develop their literacy strategy, and influences policy.**

By talking to its founders and trustees, and the schools, academy trusts and charities they have worked with over the years, I've been able to build a picture of where it's come from and where it's going.

"What we're trying to drive is policy, at the end of the day," says Sarah Driver, who co-founded the charity with her husband, Mark. "We still have 6 million people in this country who are functionally illiterate and have been through our education system.

"No one charity can change what happens in every school – but we can hopefully influence the government to focus on the 10% of children who struggle with literacy, and who end up costing the state millions of pounds."

DYT has developed a model for supporting schools to improve their whole-school literacy. The Drive for Literacy programme was incubated within the Ark schools multi-academy trust and is now available to any school that applies to the charity.

"DYT is about the only place I've come across where all the research and up-to-date ideas on supporting

children with literacy difficulties and particularly dyslexia are all in one place," says DYT trustee Sophy Blakeway, formerly the Director of Education for Ark.

DYT trustee Giles Paxman sees the charity's work in schools as vital to its capacity for effective advocacy. "We are out there in schools – we are on the ground, that's our strength," says the former British ambassador to Mexico and Spain, who became a trustee in 2017 when approached by his long-term friends, Mark and Sarah Driver.

"Something that I bring is my experience of working in government – knowing how government works and what are the levers that you can pull. How to construct policy papers, how to make a policy case, how to put forward arguments in a way in which they can have impact."

Paxman was keen to give something back after a lifetime in the civil service, where he frequently encountered the kinds of problems that can be posed by people who can't read and write.

"It is clear to me that literacy is a problem that can be tackled," he says. "People with literacy difficulties can realise their goals through other means – and that is what I think DYT is all about and why their work is important."

Founding trustee Elaine Parrish, who met Sarah Driver when she was Chair of Governors for their local primary school, had her eyes opened to the problem of poor literacy during her years as a lay magistrate. "A lot of people came to court not able to read and write – they couldn't even take the oath," she recalls. "So I was always anxious about people who didn't get a good start at school. It's really frightening the impact of that on their adult life.

"The thing we're desperate to do is keep raising the profile of all these kids who are not being taught properly because the teachers themselves haven't been shown how to help them," says Parrish.

Since DYT was founded, it has trained over 10,000 teachers and impacted over 50,000 pupils. It has supported charities, published research reports, witnessed to the Commons Education Committee and lobbied MPs as part of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs.

This is the story of DYT to date, and its vision for the next ten years.

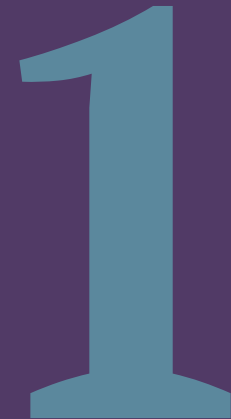


The Driver Youth Trust was created in 2009 by one couple who understood on a personal level the challenges faced by children with literacy difficulties.

Sarah Driver, herself an avid reader, remembers the heartbreaking moment she gave up on trying to get her youngest child to read, age 11, describing it as a “torturous, soul-destroying” endeavour. She and her husband, Mark, himself dyslexic, concentrated instead on empowering him to learn.

Mark and Sarah were fortunate to be able to pay for specialist provision for their own children. They founded DYT with the aim of extending that care to young people who aren't managing to access the support they need.

This is their story.



# 1. The DYT backstory

**Mark Driver was 46 when he was first diagnosed with dyslexia. He had just retired from the hedge fund management group he had co-founded eight years earlier, to enrol on a viticulture degree and fulfil his long-standing dream of starting a vineyard.**

The positive diagnosis wasn't a huge surprise to Mark, who by this time had raised three children with the condition, but what did come as something of a surprise was that after years of struggling in school, he was finally being offered all kinds of support, including a computer.

"I thought, 'I'm 46 and I've managed to cope until now!'" he laughs. He didn't take it up.

Mark struggled through his Surrey state schools in the 60s and 70s, often truanting because he found school "humiliating". He became incredibly successful working in finance, however.

Despite taking five attempts to pass his English language O-level and failing to complete the degree he started at Lancaster University, Mark pursued a successful career in stockbroking, investment management, then hedge-fund management.

"There are lots of things dyslexics can do," he says. "It's just getting through that hurdle of school, getting to the other side – and you have to have some kind of functional literacy."

Helping young people to achieve just that is something in which Mark and Sarah have invested heavily over the past ten years, through the charity they founded in 2009, Driver Youth Trust.

Its origins can be traced back to the early 2000s, when Sarah organised a group of concerned parents at her children's primary to "harangue" the chair of governors about issues within the school.

When I tell Sarah this description of events – as narrated by Elaine Parrish, then chair of governors at St Stephens Church of England primary school in Twickenham – she laughs delightedly. We're seated in the couple's conservatory in their house in Twickenham, West London.

So is she a troublemaker?

"I think I am," she confesses. "I got it from my father, actually. He was a big trouble-maker."

Sarah grew up in Hong Kong with two older brothers, her mother and barrister step-father, Brook Bernacchi OBE QC JP, who set up the colony's first quasi-opposition party, the Reform Club of Hong Kong, advocating for more representative government and improved public services.

In his capacity as party chair, Bernacchi served as an Urban Councillor on the municipal council for over

forty years. "My entire childhood was people arriving, needing help with paperwork and things," recalls Sarah. "And he would never ever take a gift. So people would come and they'd bring cookies. And I spent a lot of time running down the path, giving these things back."

He also set up the Hong Kong Sea School, to train young disadvantaged boys for a career at sea, as well as SARDA, the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers and another for ex-prisoners. On Lantau Island where they lived, he ran a tea plantation where, in Sarah's memory, "everybody who was employed was an ex-con or a drug addict."

Having moved to England age 18 to study law at Bristol, she pursued her own career as a solicitor in the City and in Hong Kong.

Mark, who grew up in Surrey, met Sarah in 1985 when she was working two restaurant jobs and he was working as a skipper for a fleet of holiday boats. He proposed to her almost immediately. That kind of impulsive decision-making is rather typical of them both, admits Sarah, as she buzzes around the kitchen making tea and sandwiches.

Impulse or intuition, it's worked. They've been together for over three decades, during which they've established a vineyard, set up a charity and raised four children.





The eldest two – Brook and Millie, are both dyslexic. Their third child, Faye, wishes she was, jokes Sarah, because the others got all the attention. Archie, who's now 20 and working in the family business, has a severe version of the condition and, like his father, dropped out of university due to an inability to access the curriculum.

“Dyslexia never leaves you,” says Mark. “You’re always dyslexic – so I still struggle very much with my writing. At school it was the most frustrating thing – you want to use a particular word and you don’t know how to spell it.”

Although he was sent to remedial reading classes at Salesian School, his Catholic comprehensive in Surrey, and got extra help from a teacher, Mark never really learned to read fluently.

He remembers a “lovely line” on one of his reports that said something along the lines of, “Mark could do very well if he attended more often”.

“As someone who struggles with literacy, you will find alternative means not to be there,” he explains. “I would always cycle to school and have a puncture, so would have to go home and fix it, or I’d be ill. You do all these things to cope with the frustration of being humiliated, which is what school is for many dyslexics – a public humiliation.”

While he has been incredibly successful, Mark doesn’t buy into the cliché that dyslexics are always amazing entrepreneurs: “It’s some and some. It’s the organisation skills which are going to let you down so you need to build a good team around you.”

Similarly, Sarah dislikes the tactic – often used by campaigners – of rolling out famous dyslexics to argue that the condition sets people up for

alternative routes to success. “People say, ‘Oh, it’s a gift. And you’re really good at art.’ No, it’s not a gift, actually. Don’t give me that birthday present. And they’re not all good at art,” she says.

“You have bright dyslexics, and you have not-so-bright dyslexics. And heaven help you if you’re a not-so-bright dyslexic.”

.....

The Drivers believe all children with literacy difficulties should have access to the very best support, regardless of their ability to pay – which has been the motivation behind DYT’s work over the last ten years.


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At one point during our interview, Sarah sweeps her arms around, indicating the conservatory and gardens of their large detached house in Twickenham, West London. “I think I’m lucky that I’ve got this,” she says. “And I just think it’s luck, and that you have a moral imperative to actually do something.”

Her first step in trying to change the system was the infamous parent meeting with Parrish, back in the early 2000s. Parrish quite sensibly responded to Sarah’s criticisms by inviting her to join the school’s governing board.

It was an eye-opening experience. “I would come home frustrated and Mark would say to me, ‘Now what you’ve got to do, Sarah, is you’ve just got to tell





“ I was just driven  
by this sense of  
utter unfairness

them.' And I said, 'Nu-uh. They're all volunteers. You can't tell anybody anything.'

"I would say I was a little bit of a thorn in their side."

Sarah felt particularly committed to the primary school, having spent 13 years walking to and from it every day, as she watched her four children grow up.

"By my fourth, I was little bit more savvy about standing up," she says.

In order to fit her work around the four children, over the previous decade Sarah had retrained to teach Back to Business courses at the Richmond Adult Community College and later, lecture in law for the Open University. She also spent some years working as a Commercial Mediator.

Parrish was devastated when after three years, Sarah wanted out. "She took me to lunch and said she was leaving," she recalls. "I cried, I remember, because I thought, 'I can't do this job without you!'"

So when Sarah called her up a few months later – in early 2009 – and asked her to join the board of a charity she was setting up, Parrish jumped at the chance of working with her again.

Parrish recalls that the Drivers were reluctant to put their name to the trust, but she encouraged them to do so, saying they should be proud of all they had achieved, and the charity would be a legacy for their children.

"She's a bit like marmite, is Sarah," says Parrish. "I think some people are envious of her actually, and don't get on with her, but I think she's absolutely an amazing woman. I'm old enough to be her mother. But she lights up my life, she's wonderful."

DYT was set up initially with the broad remit of giving young people opportunities they would otherwise not have had, but the Drivers soon realised that almost subconsciously they were being drawn to support organisations focused on literacy. They started off by grant-funding various charities and

providing scholarships to independent schools – having found that Archie had hugely benefitted from his time at a specialist dyslexia boarding school near Oxford, Bruern Abbey, then at Brighton College, which has a specialist dyslexia centre.

"I was just driven by this sense of utter unfairness," says Sarah. "I could take my child to Bruern Abbey, and I could battle and get into Brighton College. But what if you can't afford it?"

They donated large amounts of money to youth charities operating in their borough. Much of their work was through the Richmond Youth Partnership and included a mobile bus that would offer counselling and advice to young adults. They also funded a skate park and a counselling service, Off The Record, that they continue to support.

Around 2010, shortly after they'd set up DYT, Mark, then working as an investment manager, was invited to a fundraising ball for the newly created academy trust, Ark schools. The couple went along and ended





up pledging money for an after-school reading programme.

“We always were very engaged,” recalls Sarah, “and I think they nearly fell off their perch when we said we wanted to see what the money had been used for.”

They went to visit Ark’s first all-through school, King Solomon Academy, located in a deprived ward of the London borough of Westminster. Inspired by the Knowledge Is Power Programme schools in the US, it used traditional teaching methods, a strict discipline system including silent corridors, and set aspirations high from the start – teaching pupils the names of the Russell Group universities they were aiming for.

“We were blown away,” recalls Sarah. “We just loved the ambition for these kids.”

King Solomon Academy went on to top the Department for Education’s GCSE league tables in 2015, as the best non-selective secondary school in England.

It was the time when multi-academy trusts were in their infancy, and the government was offering match-funding for philanthropists to sponsor new academies. Sophy Blakeway had recently started as Ark’s Director of Primary and the Drivers were considering sponsoring a school.

“Sophy just took me to one side and said, ‘Sarah, we can do something much more exciting,’” she remembers.

That “thing” would eventually develop into Drive for Literacy, a whole-school programme for training

teachers to identify and support children with literacy difficulties and develop capacity within the school system, that would be rolled out not just across the Ark academy trust, but in primary and secondary schools across the country.

“My dream,” says Sarah, “is that if a teacher has done a course with us, they can say, ‘I’ve been at a Drive for Literacy school and I’ve had training on X, Y and Z. So when they apply to jobs, the school will look and think, ‘Oh, that’s a teacher we need!’”

The Drivers decided also to sponsor two academies in Hastings: Ark William Parker Academy and Ark Blacklands Primary Academy. The latter, after being taken over by Ark, went from being in special measures to being rated outstanding by Ofsted in under three years – one of only eleven schools in the country to achieve this.

But it’s not only work in individual schools that the Drivers are working on. Over time, DYT has broadened its remit to include advocacy.

“I truly believe that it is our duty to give every child the best education they can have,” says Sarah.

The Drivers are fierce in their commitment to influencing government policy so that every child with literacy difficulties can get the support they need.

“One charity can’t reach every child,” concludes Mark. “But the government can. Which is why we are relentless in highlighting the issue of children with literacy difficulties at every opportunity.”

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**Since 2009, DYT has invested £6 million in education in England. The Ministry of Stories was granted £10,000 to improve the accessibility of their writing programme for young people with dyslexia and to train their staff but there was a significant underspend. Therefore the Ministry re-approached the Trust in 2017 with the idea of using the remaining funding to support the development of their Speak Up programme and, recognising that oracy is key to developing literacy, DYT agreed.**

In December of last year, teachers, politicians and representatives from leading educational organisations sat in Parliament and listened to Kirsty give a speech she had crafted on the impact of the school system on mental health.

Kirsty was just one of 17 young people to speak up in front of an audience of professionals on topics that they cared about. Over the previous nine weeks, the year 9s, selected by their teachers as particularly likely to benefit from the programme, had all been coached by poet Keith Jarrett and a team of volunteers to craft and deliver a speech.

Participants were a mixture of students needing additional literacy support, and high achievers in need of an opportunity to push themselves. As is the case for all of Ministry of Stories' programmes, young people from low-income families were prioritised.

The Speak Up programme, which was partly funded by a grant from DYT, was piloted and refined with year 9 pupils in Bridge Academy, in the East London borough of Hackney, and is now being extended to another nearby secondary school.

Over nine weekly sessions, young people were encouraged to identify their own personal politics, draft and re-draft their speech and take a critical perspective on their work. They were coached in delivery by Jarrett, a performance poet and fiction writer from East London, with support from the Ministry's team of volunteer writing mentors.

"Before I felt really nervous about speaking in public because I didn't know if people would judge me. Now I feel more confident than before but still a little bit nervous about speaking in public," said Annie, who took part in the 2018 programme.

Meg Hiller, MP for Hackney South and Shoreditch, hosted the Speak Up participants in Parliament. The charity's staff, supporters and volunteers reached out to their networks to invite local MPs and experts in the areas the young people had chosen to speak about, which were anything from women's football to gang violence, mental health to the importance of music education.

"Before I didn't speak in front of my class, let alone an audience so the programme helped me with my confidence. Now I am more ok and not nervous about it and I volunteer myself to speak when we do class projects," said Bridge Academy pupil Halime.

"Speak Up is not just about developing confidence in public speaking. It's about helping young people see that their thoughts and experiences matter," said Miram Nash, writing programme leader for the Ministry of Stories. "Being heard by politicians, activists and professionals has a lasting impact on our young writers."



Since 2009  
DYT has  
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# 2

Drive for Literacy is DYT's flagship literacy programme. It's a bespoke service whereby DYT consultants assess the needs of a school, together with the senior leadership team, and recommend interventions and training to improve their whole-school literacy strategy, including their provision for children with literacy difficulties.

This is the story of how Drive for Literacy was developed in partnership with one pioneering academy trust in the early days of the academies programme.

# 2. How Drive for Literacy was created

**If there's one place to see what Drive for Literacy looks like when it's truly embedded into the design of multiple schools, it's the Ark schools multi-academy trust.**

"It's absorbed into the fabric of Ark," says the charity's CEO Lucy Heller.

It was at Ark schools that Drive for Literacy was developed into the programme it is today, through an initial relationship struck in 2010 between Sarah Driver and their then Director of Primary, Sophy Blakeway, who is now a DYT trustee.

DYT was just setting up, and so was Ark. Blakeway had a strong personal interest in literacy and special educational needs – so much so that she had insisted on taking on the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) role in both Hampshire primary schools where she was previously headteacher.

"I think the head is a great SENCO because they can be very bossy – and have their hands on the funds!" she says.

Blakeway accompanied Sarah on various visits to other schools – including Bruern Abbey, the

independent specialist dyslexia school in Oxfordshire that Sarah's son Archie was attending.

"It was just marvellous to meet someone so inspired and inspiring – it was a tonic to us all," says Blakeway. "Sarah did work to keep Ark schools with literacy at the forefront of our work – it was a very powerful way of keeping us on track."

Ark and DYT created a working group with Blakeway, Sarah and DYT founding trustee Elaine Parrish at its core. Other members included Ark's Speech, Language and Communications Consultant, Carly Biggam, their Network Lead for SEN and Behaviour, Eugene Du Toit, and for a while even included Ark's Research and Development Director, Amanda Spielman, who is now Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

"Somehow we came up with this idea of a project to train teachers to be better at teaching children with dyslexia," says Blakeway. "Particularly primary, this was because I was in charge of primary at the time."

"I think the idea was that through Ark we would show a model to the world of great dyslexia teaching."

Sarah explains the reasoning behind this decision:

.....  
"What makes Drive for Literacy different is that it requires buy-in from headteachers, senior leaders and governors to understand the merit of addressing literacy for those who struggle with it. It's not a sticking plaster, it's not about a child spending 20 minutes in a corridor with a teaching assistant; it's about sustainable, cultural change bringing about consistent improvement in literacy outcomes at all levels."  
.....





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It's about sustainable, cultural change bringing about consistent improvement in literacy outcomes at all levels





Between 2012 and 2017 DYT invested around a million pounds in screening children, donating to school libraries, developing resources and training teachers and teaching assistants – including paying the salary of one full-time dyslexia specialist teacher.

Venessa Willms, Ark's current Director of Primary, then founding headteacher of King Solomon Academy Primary, describes the early years of the collaboration as "quite exploratory".

She explains: "We knew that there were gaps in children's learning, and it wasn't even specifically dyslexia, it was children with literacy gaps: how do we identify them? What do we do about them? And how do we know that are having an impact? That was the starting point."

DYT funded the screening for all children suspected of having literacy difficulties, then recommended appropriate evidence-based interventions and provided the training their teachers would need to implement them.

"I suppose that was when the programme really started taking shape for us," recalls Willms, "in that [Ark's specialist dyslexia teacher] worked with various people within the DYT head office to create these training programmes."

This training remains embedded in their initial teacher training modules to this day.

"It is in the DNA," she adds. "Our schools still use the website and the toolkit that was developed through them, and the training programmes are still part of our modules that we deliver."

Ark trains around 150 new teachers every year.



Gathering sufficient data to evaluate impact of Drive for Literacy turned out to be a sticking point, however. Ark was in its early days as a trust, and only 14 children were tracked all the way through the programme from start to finish.

Ark's evaluation reports show that the children on the programme were making excellent progress, with the performance of these SEN students consistently 20 percentage points above the national average, and the performance gap between SEN and non-SEN students 10 percentage points below.

Reading and writing progress for DfL-screened students was also above that of non-screened students in each of the four cohorts where screening was performed, during key stage one. The tracking systems weren't set up, however, to be able to demonstrate continued impact to the end of primary school.

Similarly, in the first three years of secondary school, the reading age gap between SEN and non-SEN students narrowed significantly in the schools that took part in the programme, while it widened in non-participating schools. These improvements were not reflected in the results of the general assessments administered across Ark schools at the

age of year 9, however as fewer schools participated and "we tested slightly different things," says Willms, explaining that the results aren't directly comparable.

Sarah would have liked to see the programme implemented more thoroughly, for a longer period, in order to collect enough data to really see the impact at scale. "I'm extremely grateful because [Ark] allowed me to go in and develop a programme," says Sarah. "It allowed DYT to work in a very professional organisation with incredibly motivated people, and I'm massively grateful to them for that. But I would have loved to see it taken it to the next level."

Talking to Willms and Heller at Ark's central London offices, it's clear that DYT's legacy continues to this day.

The team developing Ark's Maths Mastery and English Mastery programmes, which they now sell to other schools, took account of children with dyslexia or literacy problems in a way that they likely wouldn't have done without the DYT specialist working at its heart, explains Willms.

Another hugely important DYT legacy was to embed the "graduated response" within Ark's teaching approach, says the primary director.



“The end goal is to try and change the culture rather than a quick fix

This is an approach detailed in the 2014 SEN Code of Practice, which means that all teachers are trained to implement inclusive quality-first teaching to the whole class, but various additional, monitored interventions are available for those that fail to respond.

“The work that DYT did with us helped us develop a standard graduated response across all of our primary schools, which gave us a very powerful way of talking about children and progression that we didn’t have previously,” says Willms.

Once they had landed on a programme that worked, DYT expanded its reach – inviting any school in England to apply to receive the Drive for Literacy programme, either free or at a subsidised rate. In 2017/18, 30 schools received the programme, with 2000 teachers trained in inclusive literacy strategies and over 10,000 children directly benefitting.

The programme is highly tailored, with a consultant allocated to each school, who will do an initial audit based on the school’s data and teaching and learning policies. They will meet with senior leaders, students and parents where possible, and also do a learning walk through the school. At the end of the first day, they will negotiate with the school up to three focus areas to work on for the year, which could be anything from inclusive classroom practices or effective use of teaching assistants, to developing writing, creating a literacy policy or moving from decoding to comprehension and inference.

The consultant then creates an action plan, which they share with the school for input to ensure that it’s co-produced.

“We want to make sure there’s ownership of the programme in the schools,” explains DYT consultant teacher Kelly Challis. “It’s very much based on partnership. We want to work with staff – to model practice and highlight how things can be done in the future.

“The end goal is to try and change the culture rather than a quick fix.”

So have DYT managed to show a model of great dyslexia teaching to the world?

“They’ve got all the best practice identified, are training people about it, care about it and they know how to help,” says Blakeway, who is now retired from teaching but has become a DYT trustee.

“Sarah and Mark are fantastic people. And the work they do with literacy is still close to my heart.”



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The reading age  
gap between  
SEN and non-  
SEN students  
narrowed  
significantly

# 3

Any state school in England, whether primary or secondary, can apply to have Drive for Literacy in their school. To schools that merit a bursary, DYT delivers the programme at a subsidised cost – and DYT literacy consultants work with the school to tailor the programme to their needs.

This is the story of one primary school in Hastings that has benefitted from the programme.

# 3. Drive for Literacy in a school

**Marie Burgess joined St Leonards as deputy head six years ago, when it was going into special measures – and just as its headteacher was leaving.**

“We were a local authority school and the local authority just came in and told us, ‘this is what you’re doing’”, recalls Burgess. The problem was, the teachers weren’t engaging with their advice.

The contrast between this, and the approach taken by the Drive for Literacy consultants is one reason Burgess now raves about the programme. “It’s very much a collaborative approach, so we looked at where our areas of development were, where our strengths were, and made sure any work we put in fulfils that agenda,” she explains.

Burgess – who was acting head for two years before being appointed as principal when the school academised in 2015 – first heard about the Drive for Literacy programme when DYT Director Chris Rossiter presented to a meeting of headteachers in Hastings.

“The DYT presentation happened at the right time for us. I was looking for something different and couldn’t find the support within our local authority,” recalls Burgess. “All the things Chris said and what DYT could offer sounded perfect and just what we needed.

“It ticked all the boxes. It had a variety of approaches for the support. It would enable us to build a

relationship with the training provider, which was important as staff were wary. During special measures they felt they had sometimes been ‘done to’ and not made part of the decision-making process.

“We also knew we had some issues around support for children with dyslexia.

“We were all shocked it was free, though. It’s invaluable. I would pay full price for it.”

Between 2016 and 2017 DYT offered Drive for Literacy to schools for free. However it quickly became apparent that the approach worked less well when schools did not make a financial contribution to the programme. “We need buy-in,” explains DYT CEO Chris Rossiter. “To really benefit from Drive for Literacy schools need to commit, and we found that this means a financial commitment as well as a broader commitment to change”. Drive for Literacy is still substantially subsidised though, with bursaries available for up to 75 per cent of the cost of the project.

St Leonards was an ideal candidate for the programme. Located in an area of high deprivation in Hastings, it has been in and out of special measures since 2007. “We want to work with the schools that need us most” says Rossiter. “Whether that is because of their pupil cohort – high levels of SEN, for example - or because the school is not achieving its

potential - in other words, it’s had a poor Ofsted or assessment outcomes.”

Between the summer of 2016, when the school started the programme, and 2018, they saw a leap from 21% to 68% of year 6 pupils passing all three components of their key stage 2 SATs exams (reading, writing and maths).

The primary school is now in its third year of the programme and will continue the partnership next year, even though it’s now on a steady improvement trajectory.

“There’s value in it whatever situation you’re in,” says Burgess. “If you’re in requires improvement or special measures, there’s so much you have to do. I almost see the value of it more now.”

DYT senior consultant teacher Kenny Wheeler spends six days per year at the school, and tailors the support to the school’s needs. This might include one-on-one mentoring with the SENDCO, whole-staff training sessions, or lesson observations. Around twenty teachers and twenty support staff have received the training each year.

The school’s SENDCO, Sarah Pike, had never been one before she was recruited to the role. “I took a bit of a risk,” says Burgess. “That was part of the package when I employed her – that she would work with the DYT and Kenny”.





Burgess also decided to scrap their existing SEND systems and redesign them from scratch, in collaboration with DYT.

Pike has had four one-on-one sessions with Wheeler so far. “She comes out of them absolutely buzzing,” says Burgess. “The impact those sessions have had this year on the provision for our SEN children and our vulnerable children has been unbelievable.”

Wheeler is effective because he is “very good at empowering and coaching and mentoring – and encouraging you to find the answers, rather than doing it for you,” says Pike. “And he has been great about being realistic. I tried to run before I could walk – he’s kept it really achievable.”

“I’ve had some very experienced SENDCOs before and I would say the provision now is better than it’s ever been,” adds Burgess, “and that’s definitely down to Kenny working with my new SENDCO.”

Other teachers have fed back positively, too.

“I think the thing we’ve noticed,” says Burgess, “is that the CPD we were offered by the local authority was not particularly high quality, so you’d see staff not engaging with it.

“This is more up-to-date – and because they’re delivering things the staff don’t know, they get excited.

“One of my teachers recently said, ‘I always feel invigorated after the sessions and CPD,’ which I thought was a really lovely thing to say.

“You notice that the staff have reacted straight away – after a staff meeting, they will email me to

say, ‘I went on and read this – what do you think?’ Or they’ve gone away and tried something.”

Wheeler is keen to emphasise that the end goal is to try and change the whole-school culture rather than bring a quick fix. “St Leonards have seen it very much as a working partnership and what can we do to chip away, and to gradually embed different approaches within the learning environment,” he says.

“You have to have a strong Drive for Literacy lead and that person has to be on the senior leadership team. But I haven’t found one that isn’t.”

Burgess, meanwhile, is full of gratitude for the support her teachers and pupils have received through the Drive for Literacy programme.

“When budgets are so tight and all of our support services are being cut, to still have that really high quality at a ridiculous price – I can’t thank [DYT] enough really,” she says.

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It’s very much  
a collaborative  
approach

After several years of funding literacy charities and projects, then developing literacy programmes of its own, in 2013 DYT broadened its remit to include policy advocacy.

“We recognised that while our interventions could change the lives of individual people, working to change policy had the potential to extend that support to all children in every school across the country,” says Sarah Driver.

Here’s a flavour of DYT’s current policy positions, together with some of the advocacy they’ve been involved with.



# 4. The drive to change policy

**After many years and multi-million-pound investments in improving the teaching of literacy in schools in England, Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards, announced in early 2019 that the “debate is over” about the best way to teach reading.**

DYT would dispute that.

It’s a subtle but important point. “Phonics is the answer to decoding, but it doesn’t make literacy,” explains DYT’s Director of Operations Karen Wespieser.

While the schools minister’s favoured approach to literacy – systematic synthetic phonics – has undoubtedly raised literacy standards across the country, DYT believes there is a danger that its very success will mask the real challenges for the children with literacy difficulties.

Of the 18% of year 1 pupils who do not reach the expected standard in the phonics check – a statutory, standardised national test – nearly half (45 per cent) have a special educational need.

“These pupils need accurate and timely identification and additional support,” says DYT CEO Chris Rossiter. “Literacy difficulties don’t all manifest identically – but what we do know is that, by their very definition, they are persistent difficulties that may not respond to conventional educational interventions.”

While high-profile examples are often cited in the media of people with dyslexia who have been incredibly successful, this is not the reality for most. The Prison Reform Trust reports that over half of people entering prison are assessed as having the literacy skills of an 11-year-old or below.

And it’s the way in which children with literacy difficulties are often conveniently left out of the equation that the charity has been working relentlessly to counter. As recently as 2016, in Justine Greening’s green paper, Schools That Work for Everyone, mentions of SEN were conspicuously absent.

“We want children with literacy difficulties to be thought about in all the education papers coming out,” says Wespieser.

Teacher training must be an essential component of any strategy, adds Rossiter. “We need to train teachers, SENDCOs and school leaders in evidence-informed techniques that can be used in mainstream classrooms, which help many students and harm none. Without this support, these children can struggle with reading for years and fail to access the curriculum in any meaningful way.”

DYT’s policy advocacy takes many forms – from meeting with policy-makers to witnessing in front of the Commons Education Committee, commissioning

research, submitting evidence to consultations, briefing journalists, speaking at conferences and writing articles for the press.

Here we take a look at two significant policy projects of the past ten years: the 2009 Rose Report and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs.

## The Rose Report: Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties

When Sir Jim Rose began his review of dyslexia in 2008, commissioned by then Education Secretary, Ed Balls, he was shocked to find prominent educationalists still denying the existence of the condition – despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

“There was a substantial lobby from people like Joe Elliot [a professor at Durham University] who were saying dyslexia was a meaningless term, it doesn’t exist – what it really is, is children who need better teaching and proper diagnostics,” says the former director of inspection for Ofsted.

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# Phonics is the answer to decoding, but it doesn't make literacy

“Now of course you need better diagnostics, but the most important thing was to try and steer a lot of this discussion into a much more science-led debate.”

Rose – himself an educational traditionalist and former primary head, who celebrates the shift in primary schools over the past decade from “creativity, self-expression and project work” to “direct teaching” and rigorous instruction in English and maths – is baffled that some highly influential traditionalists in the English education system still share Elliot's views.

“What surprises me about that camp, is they are just not up to speed with the research,” he muses. “We've got tonnes of research now, very well done, which disclaims the business that there aren't conditions which could and should be described as developmental dyslexia, which in part are heritable.”

One of the main recommendations of the Rose Report, published in 2009, was that teachers should be trained in dyslexia support according to a three-tier system – in which the “foundation tier” of all classroom teachers would be trained to a level where they “will have considerable understanding of how to teach children who have dyslexic difficulties.” The second and third tiers, to which every school would have access – if not one of their own – would be recognised as specialist dyslexia teachers.

To Rose's “great surprise”, Balls accepted his proposals.

What Rose was perhaps unaware of at the time, is that Balls himself struggled with a speech impediment at school. Sharon Hodgson, MP, who says that Balls commissioned the Rose Review following her lobbying, said she only found out later that Balls had a stammer when he was younger.

“So he understood the effect of when you've got a learning disability – how it can affect your self esteem,” says the MP for Washington and Sunderland West. “He wouldn't have been able to read out in class – he's probably got memories like all kids with SEN have, of having tough times back in your school days. It meant he was very receptive to the benefit of helping kids.”

Rose insists that teachers need to know how to triage the children whose literacy difficulties stem from poor teaching or a lack of exposure to language, from those who have processing difficulties that might have a genetic basis.

“You've got to make that first cut,” he says.

After this, children can be offered the right kind of support, classified as Wave 1, delivered by the classroom teacher, Wave 2 by the SENCO, or Wave 3 by a specialist for more severe literacy difficulties, as defined in the national strategy for literacy. Although the national strategies were withdrawn in 2011, the principle of Wave 1, 2 or 3 interventions is still considered good practice.

As a result of the Rose Report, which was published in 2009 – the same year as DYT was set up – Balls committed £10 million to train 4000 qualified teachers as dyslexia specialists. The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust, a partnership between several literacy charities, was designated to facilitate this.

No provision was made for tracking what happened to the 4000 specialist teachers, however, something that DYT is now conducting research to try to determine – given that this is a model that very much chimes with the charity's own approach.

“The Rose Report was seminal,” says DYT CEO Chris Rossiter. “Not only did it establish a definition of





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It's the way in which children with literacy difficulties are often conveniently left out of the equation that the charity has been working relentlessly to counter.

dyslexia that is broadly accepted by researchers and practitioners alike, but in making the recommendation to train additional specialists, it normalised the idea that established research evidence, on what works for children with literacy difficulties, needs to be shared with teachers in schools to improve their practice and overall educational outcomes for those learners.”

Rose is convinced that many schools failed to understand the value of these specialist teachers, who were to be trained to the equivalent of masters level.

“The double benefit – which I have to keep underlining – is that if you employed one of these teachers, and they’d been properly trained, you were getting a reading specialist who could, almost equal to their specialism for working with dyslexic kids, train other teachers,” he explains. “Schools could make sure they were used as a consultant across the board for teaching and learning, so you could have an extremely valuable member of staff.

“I think some of that got lost in the mist – they were thought of as almost being there to assess children and make no further contribution to the quality of reading in the school. But they also had a great potential for lifting the quality of teaching.

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“No school can be better than its teachers. It’s all about professional development – if you haven’t got that, everything else is secondary.”

.....

Rose sees charities such as DYT as an essential part of the ecosystem. “They’re the people who put legs on this,” he says. “Somebody’s got to do the front-line provision. You need an organisation that delivers. The Drivers are business people – they know how to flow things through and expect targets to be met.”

He no longer thinks it’s realistic to demand that every school have a specialist dyslexia teacher on staff, and points out that the changes to the SEN Code of Practice in 2015 shifted the focus from specialist teachers to making “every teacher a teacher of SEN”. Nevertheless, Rose maintains that the structural changes to the system over the past ten years are entirely compatible with the spirit of the report, and that they should “help, not hinder” the vision that every school has access to a specialist.

## All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs

Sharon Hodgson, MP, who chairs the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs, of which DYT is a member, entered parliament in 2005 determined to campaign on the issue of dyslexia.

The catalyst for the MP for Washington and Sunderland West – similarly to the Drivers – was the “tortuous journey” of trying to get support for her dyslexic son to access the school curriculum.

“He was nearly sacrificed on the altar of my principles,” says the Labour politician ruefully, as she recounts the story of how he struggled through the state education system for years before she eventually caved in and paid for additional specialist support – a decision that transformed his learning experience and ultimately, his life.







Joseph, now in his twenties, went through five full years in two primaries – one in Newcastle and one in London – before a teacher finally suggested that he might have dyslexia.

“We need teachers to be able to spot this!” says Hodgson. “They go through all this teacher training and yet it just happened to be one teacher in year 5 whose own child was dyslexic.”

Prior to this, teachers had suggested that she and her husband weren’t spending enough time reading with their son. “It’s a shame you’re always so busy with your political career – if only you read with him more at home, they would say when he was 6 and 7 and 8,” she recounts in a tone that betrays both outrage and chagrin.

Age 14, Joseph had a reading age of seven, but after one year of after-school support he caught up with his peers and went on to pass his GCSEs – including a C in English.

Hodgson believes state schools are wasting money on teaching assistants who don’t always provide the specialist support that is needed. She’s emphatic that the 1.5 hours per week she eventually paid for (which cost £500 for the assessment then £50 per session) did more good than the 15 weekly hours of one-on-one support from a “very well-meaning series of teaching assistants” that he received at school.

“The TAs would always fall in love with him and hold his hand, not challenge him and not teach him strategies. The hour and a half a week absolutely transformed his life. And he knows that. And it just seems such a waste, because we’re wasting money.”

When he was accepted to do a BTEC in interactive media at Gateshead College, the reaction of Joseph’s

specialist teacher really hit home with Hodgson. “She said, ‘School is just something dyslexic kids have to survive. Your real education will begin when you leave school,’” recalls Hodgson.

“As a policy maker I thought, ‘Oh my goodness! That is not acceptable!’”

When she became an MP, she knew this was something on which she wanted to campaign, and decided to bring forward a private members bill.

“I wanted mandatory teacher training – a mandatory module on SEND, including dyslexia,” she explains.

However, since members bills cannot contain anything that will require spending taxpayers’ money, she had to be creative, so she went to the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs and asked its members what they needed most.

“Access to information” is what they told her, and her bill to require government to publish data on children with SEN, and their educational outcomes, eventually got passed as the Special Educational Needs (Information) Act 2008.

Now her mission is to get all teachers trained in spotting dyslexia, and to get specialist help available to all children who need it.

“What I see the DYT doing is around the teacher training side of things,” she says, “the practical stuff in schools – reaching the children where they are. Because it shouldn’t all be about the children having to be pulled out of school, either through the parents paying or through charitable provision. That is never going to reach the one in ten children who have dyslexia.”

“If we really want to reach all kids with dyslexia, the change has got to happen in our schools.

“And then there’s the lobbying – Sarah is really good at the lobbying – I know she’s met with senior ministers.”

Not content with the success of her bill, in 2016, Hodgson became chair of the APPG, of which DYT has been a member since 2015.

Like Sarah, who says the APPG can sometimes seem like “experts talking in a bubble”, Hodgson initially found the group frustrating. “For years, it felt like we were just preaching to the converted and talking to ourselves about how terrible things were and how things could be better.”

To push their message wider, the group recently published the first of three reports that will document the human, educational and social costs of dyslexia.

For the report on the human cost, the charities – including DYT – liaised with their contacts to invite people to tell their personal stories of living with dyslexia. It was reported in the national, local and international press, when singer-songwriter and TV presenter Mollie King told her story to a meeting of the APPG in April of this year.

However, both Sarah and Hodgson are concerned that in telling the stories of celebrities, we forget that not everyone with dyslexia has a success story to tell.

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“I get slightly ratty at this,” says Sarah. “Let’s roll out all these successful Richard Branson types.’ Great. But you know what? For every one of them there are 1000 who are sitting in a school struggling.”  
.....

Likewise, Hodgson wants to highlight everyday people – especially in the report on the social costs of the condition. Around half of people in prison struggle with poor literacy and one in five has dyslexia.

So what does the Chair of the APPG want its impact to be?

“An awareness that this will pay for itself,” says Hodgson. “Ensuring that all of these teachers get proper training and CPD will only be a cost-benefit through the increased potential of all students. You won’t have anybody sitting in a classroom unidentified, thinking they are stupid.

“And there’s a real social divide to this. If you’re reaching them in school, you’re not just reaching the middle-class kids who’ll already succeed through other routes. You’re going to reach those other ones who are going to end up in more detrimental parts of the system.”

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It shouldn’t all be about the children having to be pulled out of school... that is never going to reach the one in ten children who have dyslexia

# 5

Seeking to plug a gap in the understanding of literacy difficulties, DYT has commissioned and written three research reports since 2013, looking at dyslexia teacher training, the SEND reforms and universal provision. This is the story of the research and how a small organisation sees itself punching well above its weight.

# 5. DYT research

**DYT's first foray into research came after the charity's co-founder, Sarah Driver, attended a meeting of the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs. Despite the presence of MPs, academic experts and lobby groups, she was amazed that even though the fact that one in four children were still leaving primary school without mastering the basics of reading, no one was able to say how much training teachers received in teaching those children who did not automatically pick it up.**

In characteristically forthright fashion, Sarah commissioned a researcher to find why.

The result was **The Fish in the Tree: Why we are failing children with dyslexia (2013).**

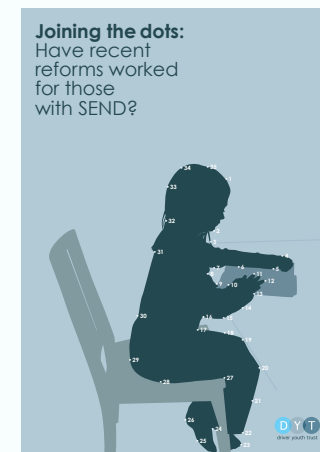
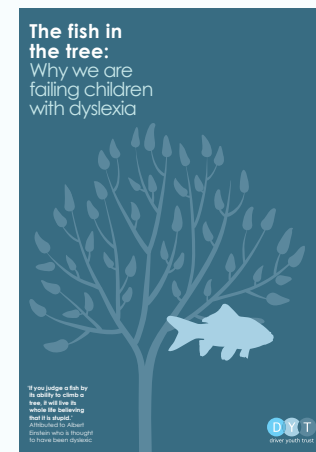
The report found that, while teachers overwhelmingly thought it important they received the training to help teach children with dyslexia, over half had received no specific training at all. More than a third of teacher training providers spent less than a day training teachers how to support children who struggle with literacy, and seven out of ten spent less than a day on specific strategies for dyslexia.

The report launched in parliament and was welcomed by then Children's Minister Edward Timpson for illustrating "the potential problems associated with training delivered in isolation from practice".

A year after the research was published, the Children and Families Act 2014, which DYT lobbied hard on, and the associated SEND Code of Practice came into force. They included various requirements designed to improve identification of children with literacy difficulties, including the duty on schools to assess pupils' skills and attainment on entry, and to regularly assess needs and review the impact of any interventions.

"I like to think that we influenced the government's thinking in this area," says DYT CEO Chris Rossiter. "Obviously it's hard to claim causality, but the Code of Practice makes sure schools identify and support children with dyslexia, with proper assessment and well-trained specialist teachers, and I'd like to think we had a hand in that."

Following the success of The Fish in the Tree, DYT commissioned the 'education and youth think and action-tank' LKMco to evaluate the impact of the 2014 Children and Families Act. The Act brought in major changes for young people with special educational needs, which were reflected in the new SEND Code of Practice. The subsequent report – **Joining the Dots: Have recent reforms worked for those with SEND? (2015)** – looked at the extent to which, one year on, the changes were beginning to take effect.



Research reports published by Driver Youth Trust





“A ‘love of reading’ is wonderful but literacy is much broader than this



The report was picked up by national media outlets and is still used within Parliament to brief policy-makers on SEND issues. It contained many policy recommendations, but Rossiter considers the introduction of joint area inspections by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission as the biggest win, following the report.

“These reviews, that we called for in Joining the Dots, have really drawn attention to the fact that SEND provision is too often too poor for too many young people.

“We knew from the research that provision was fragmented but it’s shocking to see that of the first 30 local area SEND inspections, nine local areas were required to produce a written statement of action because Ofsted and CQC judged that there were aspects of significant concern.”

The most recent report was personally written by Rossiter. In **Through the Looking Glass: Is universal provision what it seems? (2017)**, Rossiter analysed 21 strategies, policies and initiatives from some of the leading educational and policy organisations to assess the aspiration for literacy skills amongst children and young people.

“I was disappointed but not surprised to find families being blamed for the low literacy levels of young people,” says Rossiter. “Economic ‘disadvantage’ was another commonly-cited culprit. If this is all that’s going wrong, there’s a simple solution: good quality teaching and catch-up interventions.”

Yet while both these things are important, he argues, there are learners with more intractable literacy difficulties who need specialist support and they are being left out of the conversation.

As a result, Rossiter called for a mind-shift among educators, policy-makers and the public, to understand that:

## Reading is great – but it’s not literacy

A “love of reading” is wonderful but literacy is much broader than this, argues the report. Important as it is for parents to read to their children, not all literacy difficulties can be remedied in this way.

Those who have severe reading difficulties are unlikely ever to “fall in love” with reading but they can certainly benefit from the proliferation of audio-visual media to develop a love of language and a high level of functional literacy.

## Dyslexic people can be ‘academic’

Dyslexia is not correlated with academic ability. Some children with literacy difficulties can achieve top grades in core GCSE subjects, the report points out.

However, to do so, they need effective specialist strategies; teachers, SENDcos and literacy leads trained in identifying and teaching children with literacy difficulties; and additional support to access assessments and exams.

## GCSEs aren’t the only way to prove ability

Some children will never reach the national achievement standards set by government. But that’s not to say that these children cannot achieve, in secondary, further or higher education, argues Rossiter. It may just mean they need an alternative method to demonstrate what they know and can do, rather than how well they can read and write.

As the most recent report, the team are still lobbying on the recommendations. However Rossiter cites one of the small victories as an increased number of mentions of SEND in the Ofsted Annual Report (28 mentions of SEND in the 2018 report, compared to eight in Spielman’s first report in 2017 and just two in Michael Wilshaw’s final report as HMCI in 2016).

“I like to think that we influenced the government’s thinking in this area

# 6

That was DYT's story to date. So where is the charity headed next? In short, DYT wants to see good literacy practice embedded throughout the school system. Here's their three-step plan to achieve this...

# 6. What's next?

**While DYT's vision has remained much the same as it was ten years ago: to improve the life chances of young people with literacy difficulties, its methods for achieving this have evolved over time.**

From giving grants and supporting charities that work with young people, it now not only works with schools to improve their literacy provision, it also strives to change policy so that every young person in England can benefit from quality-first teaching, timely diagnosis and specialist interventions where needed.

So what does DYT want to achieve in the next ten years?



**First, to see more teachers trained in inclusive practice.**

A new initial teacher training review is currently underway, and one sign of progress will be whether there is a section dedicated to SEND, with mention of specific impairment types. The inspection of teacher training is also being reviewed, with a new framework due in 2020; again DYT are lobbying for greater attention to be paid to literacy difficulties and SEND.

“Working with 30 schools is fabulous, but it's not going to change the system. What might change the system is teachers being trained differently,” says DYT Director of Operations, Karen Wespieser.



**Second, to bring talk of literacy difficulties into mainstream conversations.**

“SEND didn't used to be mentioned in Ofsted reports or think tank reports,” says Rossiter. “We have intentionally excluded 1.2 million kids from the stats. It's crazy to think those kids don't exist, don't need support.”

“We want every government paper ever published on education and literacy to have children with literacy difficulties as a central focus, not as a bolt-on solution.”



**And finally, to unify educationalists from across the ideological spectrum around how to best support children and young people with literacy difficulties.**

“Our message is nuanced, it's not a headline grabber,” explains Rossiter. “Yet nobody thinks that a child should leave primary school without being able to read. I think you could unify everyone in education around that idea.”



“ We want every government paper ever published on education and literacy to have children with literacy difficulties as a central focus, not as a bolt-on solution.



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