

Literacy difficulties

The DYT position



Literacy: the ability to read, write, speak and listen in a way that lets us communicate effectively and make sense of the world

Literacy difficulties: persistent difficulty in reading, writing, speaking and/or listening that may not be responsive to standard education approaches and requires further intervention.

How many learners have literacy difficulties?

Literacy difficulties are found on a continuum scale of severity; all should be recognised and supported.

- The British Dyslexia Association claim that 10% of people in the UK are dyslexic¹.
- 49% of all classes have at least one student diagnosed with dyslexia².
- 12% of children leave primary school unable to read at a secondary standard³.

What is the impact of literacy difficulties on life chances?

Embedding economic disadvantage – Children living in poverty face a much greater risk of falling behind – one in three (35%) do not have the age-appropriate language skills expected of a five-year-old⁴.

Cost to the economy – Failure to master basic literacy skills costs the public purse up to £2.5 billion every year⁵.

Attainment – Despite progress made in improving literacy over the past 10 years, outcomes for those learners with literacy difficulties, have remained significantly below the national average⁶.

Behaviour & mental health – Research has linked reading difficulties to classroom discipline problems, bullying, depression and anxiety⁷.

How is the education system failing these learners?

Lack of training

DYT analysis of the 354 Inspections of ITT providers over the past 10 years, found that 1 in 7 do not mention SEN at all⁸. Improving awareness and knowledge of literacy difficulties is essential to enable teachers to meet the professional standards required of them. Without effective training, either at ITT or CPD level, we are setting them up to fail.

Lack of accountability

Reforms to curricula and exams, which include a greater emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar involving extended writing, as well as changes to exam content have put candidates with persistent literacy difficulties at a disadvantage⁹. It is vital that learners with literacy difficulties can access the curriculum and that the door to a more rigorous education and curriculum remains open to them. It is the role of accountability to ensure this accessibility is enforced.

Lack of resources

There are three areas in which a lack of resources is failing learners with literacy difficulties: identification, specialist support and a lack of an evidence base. Research by DYT predicts a third of local authorities in England do not have enough specialist dyslexia teachers¹⁰.

Recommendations

Ofsted should judge ITT providers on the quality of training delivered to trainee teachers on SEN including supporting learners with literacy difficulties.

DfE should ensure that all funded literacy CPD includes content on SEND and literacy difficulties.

Teacher educators should develop NPQs in SEN and literacy as part of the new plan to support teachers to develop and progress their career without needing to pursue a traditional leadership route.

Researchers should develop a “what works” evidence base for learners with literacy difficulties and discover how many learners with literacy difficulties there are.

School Leaders should ensure their provision enables learners with literacy difficulties to access the curriculum and that the door to a more rigorous education and curriculum is open to them.

Teachers, across all areas of the curriculum and all school phases, should know how to adjust their teaching for learners with literacy difficulties.

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