

**Title: Written Response to the Enterprise and Learning Committee,
Rapporteur Group Report on Support for People with Dyslexia in
Wales**

Date: 30th September 2008

**By: Jane Hutt, Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and
Skills**

Executive Summary

I would like to thank the Enterprise and Learning Committee and particularly the Rapporteur Group for their comprehensive report.

I have accepted the recommendations, wholly or in principle and would readily concur with the Committee's view of the need for further work in this area. Our starting point must be in developing a common definition of dyslexia to ensure a consistent approach to meeting needs across Wales. I am pleased to report that work is already underway in this area. From January 2008 schools were required to refine their data collection through the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC).

As suggested in the report and as is the case with so many specialist areas the views of professionals can often conflict. Further evidence is required before I can consider taking forward some of their recommendations. I have established an External Reference Group of key stakeholders from across Wales and an expert group to take forward a scoping study which will consider assessment, intervention and support.

In Wales we have some excellent examples of good practice in our Dyslexia Friendly schools, a campaign we have supported over a number of years working with the British Dyslexia Association. We must build on this good practice to ensure that all pupils in Wales have access to appropriate assessment, intervention and support at the earliest possible stage and that our teachers have the knowledge and skills to support them in school.

I have set out below my response to the Report's individual recommendations.

Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:

The Committee recommends that:

1. The Enterprise and Learning Committee recommends that a standard definition of Dyslexia is agreed by the Welsh Assembly Government and the local authorities in Wales in order to ensure a greater consistency across Wales in the screening, assessment and provision of local authority funded services for Dyslexia.

Response: Accept

As the Rapporteur Group suggests in their report, providing a single definition of dyslexia can be difficult and is dependent on the theory of what constitutes Dyslexia by individuals, support services and agencies. We have recently sought to rectify this situation for schools and Local Education Authorities through revised Guidance for School Information Management Systems (August 2007 - Circular No: 24-07) which informs the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC).

The submission of a Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) return is a statutory requirement under sections 537A (1) and (2) and 569(4) and (5) of the Education Act 1996.

This guidance is designed to assist mainstream and special schools and LEAs to collect and record accurate and consistent information about pupils' special educational needs (SEN) in the PLASC school management information system. The purpose of entering information about individual pupils' special educational needs, and the provision to meet those needs, is to provide schools, LEAs and the Welsh Assembly Government with reliable baseline data to inform:

- the work that SENCOs undertake with class teachers to identify and plan appropriate provision for individuals and groups of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools;
- decisions about funding allocations in schools and LEAs;
- self-evaluation and planning for improvement in schools and LEAs;
- the identification of emerging trends, including gaps in provision for individual pupils within schools, in LEAs, or nationally; and
- the monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of initiatives and interventions for pupils with different types of SEN.

Pupils with dyslexia are considered to have difficulties in cognition and learning. Such difficulties are described within the umbrella term specific learning difficulties (SpLD). This indicates that pupils display differences across their learning. Pupils with SpLD may have a particular difficulty in learning to read, write, spell or manipulate numbers so that their performance in these areas is below their performance in other areas. Pupils may also have problems with:

- fine or gross motor control skills;

- tasks involving specific abilities such as sequencing, organisation
- or phonological or short-term memory abilities;
- language development;
- forming concepts, especially when information requires first hand
- sensory experiences;
- frustration and/or low self-esteem, taking the form, in some cases,
- of behaviour difficulties.

Pupils with SPLD cover the whole ability range, and the severity of their learning difficulty varies widely. As defined within the revised guidance, specific learning difficulties include:

Dyslexia

Pupils with dyslexia may learn readily in some areas of the curriculum but have a marked and persistent difficulty in acquiring accuracy or fluency in learning to read, write and spell. Pupils may have poor reading comprehension, handwriting and punctuation. They may also have difficulties in concentration and organisation and in remembering sequences of words. They may mispronounce common words, or reverse letters and sounds in words.

Dyscalculia

Pupils with dyscalculia have difficulty in acquiring mathematical skills. Pupils may have difficulty understanding simple number concepts, lack an intuitive grasp of numbers and have problems learning number facts and procedures.

Dyspraxia

Pupils with dyspraxia are affected by an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement, often appearing to be clumsy. They find gross and fine motor skills hard to learn and difficult to retain and generalise. They may have poor balance and co-ordination, and poor awareness of body position. Their language may be late to develop, and they may have immature articulation.

The revised guidance came into force in January 2008 and it is envisaged that it will seek to address this recommendation. We will aim to continuously review the guidance and if necessary make further amendments to it as and when necessary.

Whilst we aim to ensure a consistent approach to meeting needs Members are aware that funding to support pupils with SEN, including those with dyslexia, is delivered at a local level. However, the connection between a definition and criteria for support needs to be clear. Evidence shows that defining Dyslexia generally is difficult but what is important is how a definition leads to a clear understanding of consistent eligibility criteria for support across Wales. It is my view that support for pupils should not be wholly dependent on a diagnosis and that pupils should receive appropriate intervention at the earliest possible stage to ensure that they have equal access to the curriculum.

We are already working with academics from across Wales and will shortly begin a scoping study to identify good practices across Wales. This further research will also include a literature review of academic research into SpLD.

Financial Implications:

Any financial costs of the impending scoping study can be met from existing budgets.

2. The Group heard substantial evidence that the timing of intervention seems to be crucial with early intervention more successful in bringing at risk children up to the level of their peers. The Committee therefore recommends that dyslexia screening tests in both English and Welsh are available to all children at the beginning of Year 2 who are identified as having greater reading, spelling or writing difficulties compared to their peers. This must be followed by additional support and appropriate intervention by the end of the Christmas Term in Year 2 for those children who are identified as being at risk of dyslexia by the screening tests.

Response: Accept

All children have a right to the best possible start in life. When children and young people have special needs and disabilities, it is important that these are identified at an early stage and that identification leads directly to effective early intervention and support for families, children and young people.

Early identification and early intervention are key themes in 'The Learning Country', the 'Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families 2001' and the 'SEN Code of Practice for Wales', 2002. They are central to a number of Assembly-led initiatives, including Flying Start, the Foundation Phase and the development of early support materials and they should lie at the heart of the care provided by all professionals. Effective early intervention and support can produce improvements in the health and social and cognitive development of children and young people, and can help to tackle some of the many social and physical barriers to participating fully in society that families with children and young people with special educational needs face.

I strongly agree that early identification is paramount to the development of those pupils with dyslexia. As part of my SpLD External Reference Group research and scoping study, methods of identification and testing including screening will be addressed. Attention will be given to early identification and the timing of diagnosis and ways in which schools and LEAs across Wales can adopt consistent ways to identifying children and young people who require support. This will be included in evidence of best practice in a guidance document for LEAs and schools.

We have already begun to invest in the development of bi-lingual screening tests as outlined in recommendation 8 below.

Financial Implications:

Financial implications will depend on the outcomes of the ongoing scoping study and the need for the further development of screening tests as well as developing guidance in this regard. Any additional financial requirements will be met from within existing resources.

3. The Committee recommends that accurate official information should be collected by the Welsh Assembly Government on the prevalence of dyslexia in school children; including data on the characteristics of those with dyslexia and data on the length of waiting times for individual children to have an appointment with an educational psychologist.

Response: Accept

Please refer to recommendation 1. The revised PLASC guidance will enable the Assembly Government to collect more accurate information on the prevalence of dyslexia in school children. It will also support standardisation of data collection and analysis across Wales on the characteristics of pupils with dyslexia requiring schools to record information on the level of provision to meet pupils' needs as well as their type(s) of SEN and status according to the Code of Practice's graduated response.

For the first time this year we are able to gather information about the level of provision for each of the following dimensions:

- curriculum and teaching methods (CT);
- grouping and support (GS);
- specialised resources (SR); and
- advice and assessment (AA).

These are all based on a rating scale dependent on the level of a child's individual needs and can be aggregated at a school, local and national level. It should be noted that because this is the first year that information of this nature has been collected it is likely to be refined over time.

The educational psychologist plays an important role in providing help in clarifying problems and devising problem solving strategies; in carrying out specialised assessments, including techniques in managing behaviour, and evaluating individual pupil progress. In addition to working with individual children, the educational psychologist can work with groups of pupils or teachers and learning support assistants at the classroom or whole school level, for example assisting schools with the development of SEN and behaviour policies, helping to develop knowledge and skills for school staff and assisting with projects to raise achievement and promote inclusion.

Data is not specifically gathered on the length of waiting times for individual children to have an appointment with an educational psychologist as they are

deployed by local education authorities to meet local demands and priorities. The information contained within this report would appear to be anecdotal. I have asked my officials to discuss this recommendation with the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) in Wales. This will also be considered as part of any future research undertaken as part of our scoping study on dyslexia.

Financial Implications:

None

4. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the individual institutions reassess the content of Initial Teacher Training courses to significantly improve Trainee Teachers understanding of Additional Learning Needs and this should apply to all Initial Teacher Training courses. All trainee teachers (not just for those intending to teach in infant schools) should receive increased mandatory training to enable them to identify children who have additional learning needs. All trainee teachers should also receive increased mandatory training in the provision of support for children who are achieving below the average for their cohort.

Response: Accept in principle

Revised statutory Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) Standards and requirements for initial teacher training (ITT) courses became mandatory for all trainees commencing courses of ITT from 1 September 2007. The revised QTS standards and requirements allow ITT providers increased flexibility in the way they design and deliver their ITT course programmes. The Welsh Assembly Government does not specify the content of ITT courses, or what time commitment should be attached to any particular aspect of ITT. This enables the ITT providers to use their particular expertise to develop the content of specific courses to meet the needs of their students and learners in Wales.

ITT providers are required to ensure that the design and provision of courses will enable trainees to demonstrate that they meet the standards required to gain QTS. The current QTS standards require trainee teachers to demonstrate that they understand their responsibilities under the SEN Code of Practice (including ALN), and know how to seek advice from specialists on the less common types of special education needs. They must be able to identify and support pupils who are failing to achieve their potential in learning and those experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (with guidance from an experienced teacher where appropriate) and be able to differentiate their teaching to meet pupils' needs including those with SEN. They must also demonstrate that they work collaboratively with specialist teachers.

The Welsh Assembly Government publishes a Handbook of Guidance on the QTS Standards (currently Circular 41/2006). For each of the Standards an explanation of the scope of the Standard is given, together with suggestions of the kind of evidence that students might provide to show that they have met the Standard.

ITT is designed to equip students with the necessary essential requirements to enable newly qualified teachers to teach across the key stages and subjects for which they have been trained. It covers SEN as indicated above, but the time available for more specialist areas of study is limited. The Welsh Assembly Government is of the view that more detailed specialist training in SEN is best undertaken once a teacher has completed their ITT and induction year.

Once an individual has qualified as a teacher and secures a post in a school they follow a mandatory statutory Induction programme which has allocated specifically allocated funding and dedicated time set aside for additional professional development. Newly qualified teachers have to demonstrate that they have met all the Induction standards, including standards which require NQTs to demonstrate a commitment to equal opportunities, social justice and inclusion, and also to plan effectively to meet the learning needs of all pupils including those with SEN.

We have established an Empowering Teachers Task Group as part of our Inclusion Policy and Performance Framework for Wales. The remit of the group is to consider aspects of ALN training including ITT, Early Professional Development (EPD) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to ensure all teachers have the necessary skills on entering the classroom to identify and meet a range of learner's needs. The Group membership includes a range of practitioners from different sectors and agencies

We have appointed a secondee from Bangor University to review all aspects of SEN training for teachers, support staff and school governors. The secondee has been charged with reviewing the application of ITT to meet the QTS standards across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Wales in relation to SEN to ensure consistency of approach and identify gaps in training opportunities. The secondee, who gave evidence as part of this review, is also charged with taking forward the scoping study for dyslexia.

A specific group of HEI senior lecturers meets regularly to develop a more consistent approach to ITT in relation to ALN and are working together to provide additional common guidance on the QTS standards in this area.

Working jointly with HEIs across Wales and the voluntary sector we have funded the development of a bilingual e-learning course for qualified teachers on ALN which was launched in October 2007 and the course was available to students in January 2008. This is an innovatory new training course for qualified teachers and support staff, with topics being covered such as Specific Learning Difficulties including Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. This development is overseen by a sub group of representatives from every HEI in

Wales who are also looking at developing more training for SEN within establishments.

Further e-learning modules leading to a Diploma covering early identification, intervention, inclusion, disability and equal opportunities are now under consideration.

The task groups are considering the possibility of providing more specific training on ALN during EPD during the second and third year of teaching, and provide increased opportunities for longer accredited training opportunities.

Financial Implications:

There are no additional cost implications for ITT.

Further development of the e-learning course for ALN is ongoing, we have recently tendered for a co-ordinator of phase two, the costs of which can be met from within existing budgets.

5. The Committee also recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government reassess the training given to classroom assistants, particularly as part of the Foundation Phase, for young children who are having additional learning needs ensuring that teaching the skills to support children with additional learning needs becomes a mandatory part of both the initial training for classroom assistants and a compulsory part of their continuous professional development to ensure that classroom assistants are equipped with the skills to provide this support effectively.

Response: Accept in principle

The Foundation Phase Framework for Children's learning for 3-7 year olds in Wales is an inclusive curriculum that will offer the opportunities for all children to achieve their full potential at their own pace in preparation for further learning and life. As part of our National Training Pack we have included a module for practitioners on addressing Additional Learning Needs within the Foundation Phase. This module gives practitioners a wealth of information and support as they develop coherent plans to ensure inclusion of all children in their improvement strategies. The pack has case studies to enable practitioners to reflect on their own practice and discuss ways forward to enhance their provision. There is also emphasis within the module on working with parents and on positive partnership working to ensure the best possible outcome for the children.

We are at the early stages of developing a structure for classroom assistants and this will include looking at their training and CPD. There will be a need for considerable discussion with Unions, WLGA and other partners in taking this work forward. We will want to consider how this chimes with the work on a children & young people's workforce.

In addition the e-learning course for SEN is available as a resource to all schools in Wales via the National Grid for Learning and as such is available to classroom assistants.

Financial Implications:

None

6. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government reviews the training on support for dyslexia available to SENCo's and funds additional provision as required to ensure a more even level of expertise amongst all SENCo's.

Response: Accept

The SEN Code of Practice for Wales (sections 4.15, 4.17, 5.30-5.33, 6.32-6.36) outlines the roles and responsibilities of the SENCo in early years settings, primary phase schools and secondary schools. This includes guidance on the allocation of time for SENCo's to carry out their role and also on the role of the SENCo within the management of the school.

The role of SENCo relates primarily to mainstream and other non-specialist SEN providers. It should also impact on the leadership, management and organisation of a school. The SENCo should also be responsible for helping to ensure positive outcomes for learners and high quality teaching and learning. The SENCo is responsible for ensuring that statutory requirements relating to pupils with SEN are appropriately met.

We are currently considering the implications and practicalities of providing mandatory training for SENCo's: this training being guided by agreed criteria and to be accredited through HEIs and run in partnership with LEAs. Training would provide guidance on different types of ALN including Dyslexia.

You will be aware that we have now taken legislative competence in the area of additional learning needs and consulted, as recommended by the previous Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee Review of SEN, on changes to the current statutory assessment and statementing framework. The ALN LCO enhances our powers in this regard and we are considering the role of the SENCO within the wider concept of the ALN co-ordinator. We propose during 2009/10 to embark on pilot projects to improve the current system. One of the pilot projects would focus specifically on the role of the ALN Co-ordinator and their training needs.

Research findings indicate that effective co-ordination of SEN provision in a mainstream school is a key determinant of effective provision. I am aware that the recent consultation with parents / carers and with professionals revealed considerable and widespread concerns over inconsistencies in the effectiveness and quality of service from the special educational needs co-ordinator's (SENCo's) at their children's school.

The consultation also revealed concerns that undertaking out the role of SENCo should not entail unnecessary bureaucracy in line with workforce reforms.

There is a growing consensus that future policies and frameworks of provision are more appropriately focused on the wider cohort of children and young people with ALN. The established role of SENCo lends itself well to include this wider group of learners. The pilot scheme will, therefore, relate to the role of additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo). The aims of the pilot would be to review current practice relating to the role of SENCo / ALNCo in mainstream schools and pilot good practice models for ALNCo. The objectives of the pilot project would be to:

- identify best practice models, in relation to the *Code of Practice SEN Wales* guidelines within the authority;
- determine best practice models for each phase of education and develop a pilot scheme;
- pilot a range of alternative models including the use of administrative and teaching assistants to support the role of the teacher;
- pilot clustering arrangements for smaller, primary phase schools;
- clarify the role of ALNCo within school's management team;
- develop appropriate person specifications for the ALNCo role in each phase context;
- ensure there is no unnecessary administrative burden on schools;
- produce case study materials identifying effective practice;
- ensure effective collaborative roles with other agencies and voluntary sector organisations, parent partnerships etc.; and
- explore effective means of incorporating all school-based processes relating to ALN, including those relating to Looked After Children (LAC), behaviour, English as an Additional Language (EAL) etc.

Financial Implications:

Mandatory qualification for SENCOs may have additional cost implications and will to be covered by this review. Again, if additional costs do arise they will be met from within existing additional resources.

7. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government commissions research to consider the feasibility and potential costs of training a specialist teacher in every school to post-graduate level (level4) in support of children with dyslexia.

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Assembly Government has, through the British Dyslexia Association, supported the Dyslexia Friendly schools initiative and we fully welcome initiatives by LEAs to become dyslexia friendly authorities.

We are considering how to increase the availability of accredited training to all schools and to enhance the range of courses available to teachers. The strategy for training will also be guided by information gleaned through the statutory framework pilot programmes.

This recommendation will however require consideration by the external SPLD group.

Financial Implications: There will be cost implications for schools and LEAs if we require a specialist teacher in every school. This will be considered as part of the planned scoping study.

8. The Committee recommends that screening, assessment and support for dyslexia should be equally available in both Welsh and English and that the Welsh Assembly Government should make additional resources available to meet the demand.

Response: Accept

Following publication of the Welsh Language Board's report 'Acknowledging Needs' we have established a task group looking specifically at the provision of bilingual services and resources for children and young people with SEN. During the Autumn term the group will be auditing the use of assessment tools in schools including tests for Dyslexia. The National Association of Principal Education Psychologists (NAPAP) are represented on this group.

Officials have held discussions with the Head of Cardiff University School of Psychology to highlight the importance of assessments recognising bilingual needs. The Psychology Department recently held a training day on the assessment of Welsh speaking children with newly qualified EPs and this involved such EPs from across Wales.

Bilingual resources and provision will be an aspect of the scoping study by the External SpLD Group and will inform future requirements.

We are aware that the majority of the tests currently in use in Wales are only available through the medium of English. The consequence of this is that Welsh-speaking children's abilities are in danger of being underestimated because they are being tested in their potentially weaker language.

In 2005 we seconded an LEA Welsh adviser for a term to gather information on the availability and use of resources and assessment materials in Welsh medium SEN for both first and second language users. It is intended, subject to the author's agreement and any copyright conditions, that the information obtained through this audit will be made available to all teachers in Wales through the National Grid for Learning. Furthermore in 2004, the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, launched a website: www.drws.co.uk specifically to enable sharing of Welsh language and bilingual education information.

Also, in 2005 I announced a grant of £90,000 to be made available to the School of Psychology at Bangor University, over a three year period to 2008/09, for the development of Welsh specific resources. This is ground breaking work in the development of specific Welsh language assessment tests in speech, language and verbal reasoning skills which are language specific not merely a translation of English materials. Language receptive vocabulary tests are often used as a diagnostic tool to identify specific areas in a child's learning that will require specific support. Bangor University aims to develop valid language measures for Welsh-speaking children and adults. These measures will be available for use by educational psychologists, by researchers, by teachers, by speech and language therapists, and by health professionals.

Since 2004, I have also released funding of £16k for the translation of Swansea LEAs "All Wales Reading Test," the development of a Welsh medium corpus of texts and the adaptation of materials in large print for visually impaired learners. These were launched in February 2005 and are available to all local authorities in Wales.

Financial Implications:

Any further funding of Welsh specific assessment materials will be met from within existing budgets. LAs have a duty to ensure assessment materials are available bi-lingually.

9. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government commissions an independent research project into different types of programmes in order to better identify which people are likely to benefit most from different types of assistance. This research study must be carefully planned to produce authoritative results and ethical issues given proper consideration. The research project should be developed in conjunction with the Assembly's Enterprise and Learning Committee.

The interventions to be evaluated should include:

- multisensory / movement based programmes
- phonic based reading schemes
- use of tinted lenses and coloured overlays (in conjunction with testing by an orthoptist for visual problems).

Response : Accept

I am aware of the lack of in depth research into the different approaches to meet the needs of pupils with dyslexia. We are also aware of the difficulties involved in comparing methods and the ethical issues involved in such research with children. Such research will need careful planning and in view of the wide range of methods and support systems, it would have to be

guided by a highly qualified team of academics conversant with research at a high level.

We are fortunate in Wales in having such personnel and informal discussions with academics in this field to discuss research possibilities and as a result we are currently in the process of delineating research first of all into background literature and current research noting strengths and weaknesses of methods, and secondly active research into the effectiveness of different approaches.

The following areas have been noted for research which are in line with the Enterprise Committee's recommendation.

- Traditional teaching and phonological methods
- Exercise methods including Brain Gym
- ICT and Computer programmes
- Occlusion
- Coloured Overlays
- Auditory training

This recommendation can only happen following the initial scoping exercise. It is likely as with all methods of intervention and support that "one-size" does not fit all but it is important to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the different approaches available.

Financial Implications:

The cost if the research can be met from existing budgets.

10. The Committee recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government commissions a separate, statistically robust, pilot study of the *FastForWord*® products to independently evaluate the results of this intervention.

Response : Agree in principle

We are aware of differing views regarding conclusive evidence of the success of *FastForWord* and it is only right and proper that we should look carefully at the approach and its success based on independent reports on children's progress

Within the approaches noted above is WAG's wish to look at the application of modern computer technology. It is expected that this will be part of the robust research into approaches in 9 above.

Financial Implications:

See 9 above.