Fact Sheet

Diagnosing dyslexia

Early identification is important. Parents and teachers should not wait for a child to fail before seeking support. Importantly, schools can begin providing support and adjustments as soon as learning needs are identified—a formal diagnosis isn't required.

When should dyslexia be considered?

Children with dyslexia may experience difficulties with:

- Learning letter-sound relationships
- Reading accurately and fluently
- Spelling
- Reading comprehension
- Remembering verbal information
- Following multi-step instructions
- Written expression.

Signs can often be evident in the early years of school, and concerns should be discussed with the child's teacher as soon as possible.

Did you know?

Schools do not need to wait for a formal diagnosis before providing support, adjustments or targeted literacy intervention.

Early support matters

The greatest impact is often achieved when support begins during the important literacy learning years from Prep to Year 2. The Year 1 Phonics Check also provides valuable information that can help identify students who may need additional support.

The referral process

If concerns persist despite quality classroom instruction, families and schools may discuss a referral for a formal assessment.

Who can diagnose dyslexia?

A formal diagnosis is typically provided by:

- Psychologists
- Speech Pathologists.

Teachers cannot provide a formal diagnosis, but they play an important role in identifying concerns, providing intervention and supplying information for the assessment process.

Before a referral

A referral for assessment should usually occur after a period of evidence-based literacy instruction, such as structured literacy, combined with targeted support and monitoring of progress.

Current guidance recognises that if there is evidence that appropriate intervention has already been provided, families do not necessarily need to wait an additional six months before seeking an assessment.

Referral pathways

Government schools

School staff are responsible for making referrals to departmental psychologists or speech pathologists. Parents cannot directly make these referrals but will be asked to provide consent.

Catholic schools

Some Catholic schools have allied health professionals available within the school. In other cases, the Student Support Coordinator may seek approval for an assessment through Catholic Education pathways or support families to access private services.

Independent schools

Referral processes vary between schools. Some have access to psychologists or speech pathologists, while others may assist families to locate suitable private clinicians.

Private assessments

Families may choose to arrange a private assessment regardless of school sector. Before joining waitlists, it is advisable to request information about costs and expected waiting times. Learning plans, assessment results and school reports can help inform the assessment process.

While waiting for an assessment

Support should not stop while families wait for an appointment.

Schools should continue to:

- Provide structured literacy instruction
- Monitor progress
- Implement appropriate adjustments
- Document support through learning plans where required.

Families may also consider arranging hearing and vision checks to rule out other factors that could be contributing to learning difficulties.

What happens during an assessment?

The clinician will gather information from both home and school.

This may include:

- Learning plans
- School assessment data
- Reports from other professionals
- Information about previous interventions
- Parent and teacher questionnaires.

The assessment itself may take several hours and may occur over one or more sessions.

Identifying and diagnosing dyslexia

A comprehensive assessment helps to:

- Identify learning strengths.
- Identify learning challenges.
- Determine whether dyslexia or another Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) is present.
- Understand how learning difficulties are affecting educational progress.
- Develop recommendations for school and home support.

Following the assessment, families typically meet with the clinician to discuss results and recommendations.

What families should know

A diagnosis can help.

A diagnosis may:

- Improve understanding of your child's learning profile.
- Guide intervention and support.
- Support applications for senior secondary assessment adjustments.
- Help children better understand themselves and their learning needs.

However, a diagnosis should not be viewed as the starting point for support. Support should already be in place based on identified needs.

Talk openly and positively

Helping children understand their diagnosis in a positive and supportive way can strengthen self-esteem, self-awareness and future self-advocacy skills. You can read more in our *"The importance of self-esteem and self-advocacy"* fact sheet.

Remember

The goal of diagnosis is not simply to label a difficulty—it is to better understand how a child learns and to ensure they receive the instruction, adjustments and support they need to succeed.

Scan the QR code to download the Square Pegs Parent Guide

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