

Understanding Dyslexia Diagnostic Assessments For Parents

What will a diagnostic assessment tell you?

- Information about your child's underlying ability eg verbal ability, non-verbal reasoning, IQ.
- Information about your child's cognitive processing skills: short term memory; working memory; processing speed; phonological processing.
- A clear picture of their reading skills, considering their reading accuracy, reading comprehension, reading speed and automatic recognition of words.
- A clear picture of spelling and writing skills.
- An understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of a particular pupil which will impact on their learning.
- The definition of Dyslexia being used by the assessor.
- A clear statement based on the above regarding whether your child is or is not Dyslexic.
- Possible signposting to other professionals if other Specific Learning Difficulties are also apparent.
- Recommendations for support strategies and resources to use at school and at home.

Who can do a diagnostic assessment?

- Specialist Teacher who holds a Level 7 qualification in assessment of Specific Learning Difficulties. It is preferable for the teacher to also hold a current Assessment Practicing Certificate (APC). If a report is to be used in the future for an application for Disabled Students' Allowance, the teacher must have an APC.
- Assessors can be found through professional bodies: British Dyslexia Association (BDA), Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS)
- Educational Psychologists. If a report is to be used in the future for an application for Disabled Students' Allowance, the Educational Psychologist must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

What information will they need and what does it involve?

- The assessor will need background information from parents as well as from the pupil being assessed eg developmental milestones such as walking, talking.
- They will need information from school including examples of schoolwork.
- The assessment takes approximately 3 hours. It may take place in the pupil's home, the assessor's home, at school or at a company's office.
- A full report will be provided; good practice is that parents and the pupil are offered an additional session in order for the assessor to explain the report (this can take about an hour).

When do you need to have a diagnostic assessment?

- If a pupil wants to apply for Disabled Students' Allowance when they move on to Higher Education.
- Sometimes universities will request one if the pupil has informed them that they have previously had access arrangements and want to know what the university would be able to provide.
- An assessment is not needed for Access Arrangements for GCSEs, BTecs or A Levels. The pupil will be assessed either by the school or by a specialist teacher from outside school purely with a view to establishing whether they are eligible for any access arrangements. Only the minimum amount of tests will be used – this type of assessment usually takes 20 minutes to one hour on average.
- An assessment is not needed to access additional support at school; the school will need to respond to any needs presented by a pupil regardless of whether there is a diagnosis of Dyslexia.
- An assessment will not give access to additional funding for support for a pupil.

What other reasons might lead you to a diagnostic assessment?

- Parents often consider a diagnostic assessment as they are concerned about their child's self-esteem. Would it help their child to understand that they have a specific learning difficulty?
- Parents opt for an assessment in order that they have a better understanding of their child's needs and what they can do to help them at home.
- They might also feel that it will give them a better understanding of what sort of provision they can expect at school (although as said previously, provision should be discussed on the basis of a pupil's needs regardless of a diagnosis).

What else could be considered apart from a diagnostic assessment?

- Whilst a child is at school, a general learning assessment may provide all the information needed to identify areas of strength and weakness and to inform what strategies and resources would be beneficial.
- School may already have a clear idea of skills in certain areas eg reading or writing and may only need an assessment of underlying ability/cognitive processing to look more closely at any underlying difficulties which may be impacting on a pupil's progress.