

The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust response to the Green Paper: Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability

The DST agrees with the arguments made for a case for change in the current system for SEN; we applaud the proposals to reduce bureaucracy, support parents, increase transparency, reduce conflict, and promote better multidisciplinary working by professionals to address the twin challenges of early identification and support during transitions. In our previous submission, we argued that progress towards these ends could be achieved by:

- Requiring schools and Local Authorities to set out the resources and expertise that they have to offer to meet the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- Holding school's policies and practices to account using existing systems of inspection and comparison with examples of known good-practice.
- Responding to parents need to have an agreed 'action plan' from the school below the level of a Statement
- Facilitating greater involvement of parents and voluntary sector representatives in local forums with responsibilities for making plans, moderating decisions and resolving disputes over the allocation of resources.
- Establishing agreement on a common vocabulary – or currency – in the area of recognised competencies and qualifications across the teaching workforce, thereby assisting schools in identifying their needs for resources and expertise, and making provision more transparent to parents.

Following the Rose(2009) report, the DST have argued that there is now a consensus regarding effective practice for pupils with dyslexia and literacy difficulties, but there is a remaining need to ensure that this practice is embedded throughout the school system. The DST is addressing this need by providing clear, unbiased information about the range of provision that is effective, along with illustrative case studies, and by developing and informing training and continuing professional development to support the workforce in delivering effective targeted support.

The DST can see the benefit of having a nationally recognised common framework that all schools and colleges use as an example of best practice and one which they can work towards. There are already some excellent training packages being developed by the voluntary and community sector in collaboration as a follow on from the IDP materials to up-skill the school workforce from very basic to masters level. These materials provide a solid backdrop for all schools to access; the DST would

welcome school inspections to include an expectation that all schools have accessed this information and are making efforts to improve their continuing professional development in SEND.

The DST also takes an active role in helping to raise expectations and show how children with dyslexia or specific learning difficulties can achieve great success. We welcome the opportunity to work with specialist schools and academies who make success for pupils with SEND the highest priority. We agree that there should be an emphasis on further developing and promoting schools where positive outcomes are achieved and then challenging others to match these standards. The Voluntary and Community Sector can help to promote these exemplars and can also play an important role in development and innovation. The DST recognises a role for the Strategic Partners, including the overarching Strategic Partner in coordinating and facilitating the Voluntary and community Sector's contribution to the assessment process.

Whilst there is much in the Green Paper that we welcome, the DST has some significant concerns in relation to the possible impact of changes for pupils with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia.

Bias away from identification of SEN

Whilst we support the view that slow progress and/or low achievement is not prima facie evidence of special educational needs, it must also be emphasised that slow progress and/or low achievement is not evidence of *an absence* of special educational needs. We are concerned that there appears to be a policy thrust to reduce the overall numbers of children identified as having SEND in order to save costs which will, in practice, mean that children about whom there are concerns will be left for longer before the reasons for their slow progress are investigated.

Downgrading low-severity SEN

We also fully support the view that the majority of pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties can have their needs met by resources that *should* be available in mainstream schools. However, we are concerned that this will mean that those who need additional more specialist support will be denied that by a presumption that schools can meet the whole range of needs associated with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties.

Loss of expertise in specialist teams

With the new policy of devolving funds to schools LA SEN teams across the country have been or are being dispersed. Significant numbers of trained, experienced specialist teachers have lost their jobs. It has taken years to build these up. What is happening on the ground flies in the face of what the government is trying to achieve.

When Rose and Lamb reported it was acknowledged that greater understanding of SEN was needed along with better identification and support in the classroom through improved understanding of possible barriers to learning and application of Quality First

multisensory teaching. Funding was made available to train 4000 additional specialist SpLD teachers to help address this guidance and support. Yet due to lateness of getting the funding released only 2700 have been trained. Not only is the originally identified need still unmet, with the loss of experienced specialists on LA teams and in schools there is an even greater gap in provision.

Reduction in resources for training and professional development

Another very strong support for professional development has been the Postgraduate Professional Development Grant funding. But this also has been withdrawn with the consequence that much specialist training will disappear. Local authorities, which have been the source of much CPD in this area, are cutting their CPD programmes because their teams have been so reduced. The DST welcomes the recent announcement of the National Scholarships Scheme but is mindful of the limited timeframe for applications and recognises the challenges of schools being alerted to this scheme and applying in time.

Parents perceived loss of rights of appeal

We welcome the confirmation that there are no plans to remove parents' rights to appeal to the First-Tier Tribunal (SEN and Disability) and we also support the suggestion that there should be better mediation to resolve disagreements and that extra funding will be worthwhile in this area. However, we are concerned that there is likely to be pressure on the Tribunal system to reduce the number of successful appeals and strengthen local authorities' defence of needing to make efficient use of resources when considering the best way to meet children's needs.

The DST believes that the optional personal budget for families should include the mechanism for parental choice on provision of services in light of the recommendation earlier that schools and Local Authorities are required to set out the resources and expertise that they have to offer, including assistive technology, to meet the needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

The DST believes one of the best ways to identify and develop the potential of teachers and staff to best support children and young people with SEND is to raise the importance and priority of continual professional development. The DST has developed, and is further improving, a Professional Development Framework for all practitioners working with learners with SpLD and dyslexia.

The Voluntary and Community Sector, with their wealth of expertise, can contribute enormously to the up-skilling and empowerment of other multi-disciplinary teams who will play an important role in the assessment and support of children and young people with SEND under the new guidelines surrounding the single Education, Health and Care Plan. Professionals such as health visitors, general practitioners and social services will need a base level of understanding of how to recognise, support and signpost families who may present with a range of complex and co-occurring differences.