

The Child who struggles with Reading or Spelling

When should I be worried about my child's progress in literacy?

Literacy is a broad term that encompasses reading, writing, spelling and understanding what is being read as well as analysing pieces of writing (which can include digital media). Many children struggle with aspects of literacy at various points. However with intervention, they often catch up quickly.

At Kilcolgan Educate Together we regularly test and screen children so that we can catch any difficulties early and work with the children to bring them on. The tests we use allow us to establish a child's reading age, which may be higher or lower than their actual age.

It is normal for children to develop at different levels and speeds. When we (parents or teachers) notice literacy difficulties it is important to provide extra supports as soon as possible. In school this is often ensuring that the child is in the correct reading group. It may mean practicing certain sounds or words at home.

When a child receives intervention over a period of time and struggles to catch up to their peers we need to look at what can be done. Sometimes a change in teaching styles can be enough, sometimes visual or auditory (hearing) difficulties need to be addressed. Sometimes a child will simply continue to struggle. This is when we need to start asking some more questions.

I am worried – what can we do?

Dyslexia is a term that is often used to describe difficulties with literacy. There is much research and there are many kinds of intervention programmes. The important thing to remember is that children who have literacy difficulties often have strengths in other areas. They can be very strong orally (in speech) and can creatively overcome some of their challenges.

There are a number of things that can be done:

1. In order to fully diagnose dyslexia, parents will need to engage an educational psychologist. The school has access to NEPS (National Educational Psychological Service) psychologist but NEPS is used for complex cases and as dyslexia is very common, parents will need to engage a private psychologist if they wish to pursue a diagnosis. The cost of a private educational psychologist is approximately €500, though some of this is eligible for tax relief on a Med 1. We can provide you with a list of names and contact details if you wish.

Do I have to have a psychologist involved?

No. Your child will continue to receive support in school. A psychologist is useful if you wish to see if a child will be eligible for supports during national exams (Junior and Leaving Certificate) so you may wish to wait until your child is older.

A psychologist can also grant assistive technology. This may be an iPad, laptop or reading pen. These can help children with literacy difficulties record their work and present their work more easily.

Should I apply for an Irish exemption?

[Circular 0052/2019](#) clearly outlines the criteria for an Irish exemption. Your child will need to be in *at least second class and present with significant learning difficulties that are persistent despite having had access to a differentiated approach to language and literacy learning in both Irish and English over time. Documentary evidence to this effect, held by the school, should include Student Support Plans detailing regular reviews of learning needs as part of an ongoing cycle of assessment, target-setting, evidence-informed intervention and review, including test scores (word reading, reading comprehension, spelling, other scores of language/literacy) at key points of review. In addition, at the time of the application for exemption the child must present with a standardised score on a discrete test in either Word Reading, Reading Comprehension or Spelling at/below the 10th percentile.*

2. An Irish exemption means your child will not be required to study Irish during Irish time. However it is worth asking what your child could alternatively be doing during this time. Sometimes it is helpful to grant an exemption but to only use it in part. This means that the child participates in class but that the expectations around written work and homework are reduced. It is important to discuss this with the class teacher to ensure your child is getting the best opportunities possible.

How do I apply for an Irish exemption?

The first thing to know is that your child will need to be tested on a special test (we will be using the WIAT 3) in order to determine if they fall below the 10th percentile in an element of literacy. We can do this in school or you can engage an educational psychologist.

If your child falls below the 10th percentile you will be eligible to apply for an exemption under Circular 0052/ 2019.

Is there anything else we can do?

3. Yes. There are many **programmes** available to parents and teachers to help us work with children who have literacy difficulties. We can provide you with some recommendations if you wish. It is also important to remember that children who experience literacy difficulties need much more **repetition** than their peers. They need to see and spell the same words over and over again to commit them to memory. Continue to help your child **enjoy** literacy. Continue to read to them or read together, continue to encourage them to write (and focus on the content rather than the spellings). Talk to their teachers regularly to see if there are any **specific targets** you can work on at home. And remember to nurture all of their **other talents**. Children with literacy difficulties are often very creative and talented in other areas. Ensure your child has plenty of opportunities to shine elsewhere.

This sheet was designed to help parents answer some of the common questions and provide some clarity around literacy difficulties. Every child is different and this sheet is not intended to replace meetings that you may want to have with teachers. Our teachers are always happy to help you navigate this journey together. We will not have all the answers but we are stronger together as a team. So please feel free to make an appointment and we will be happy to help if we can.