

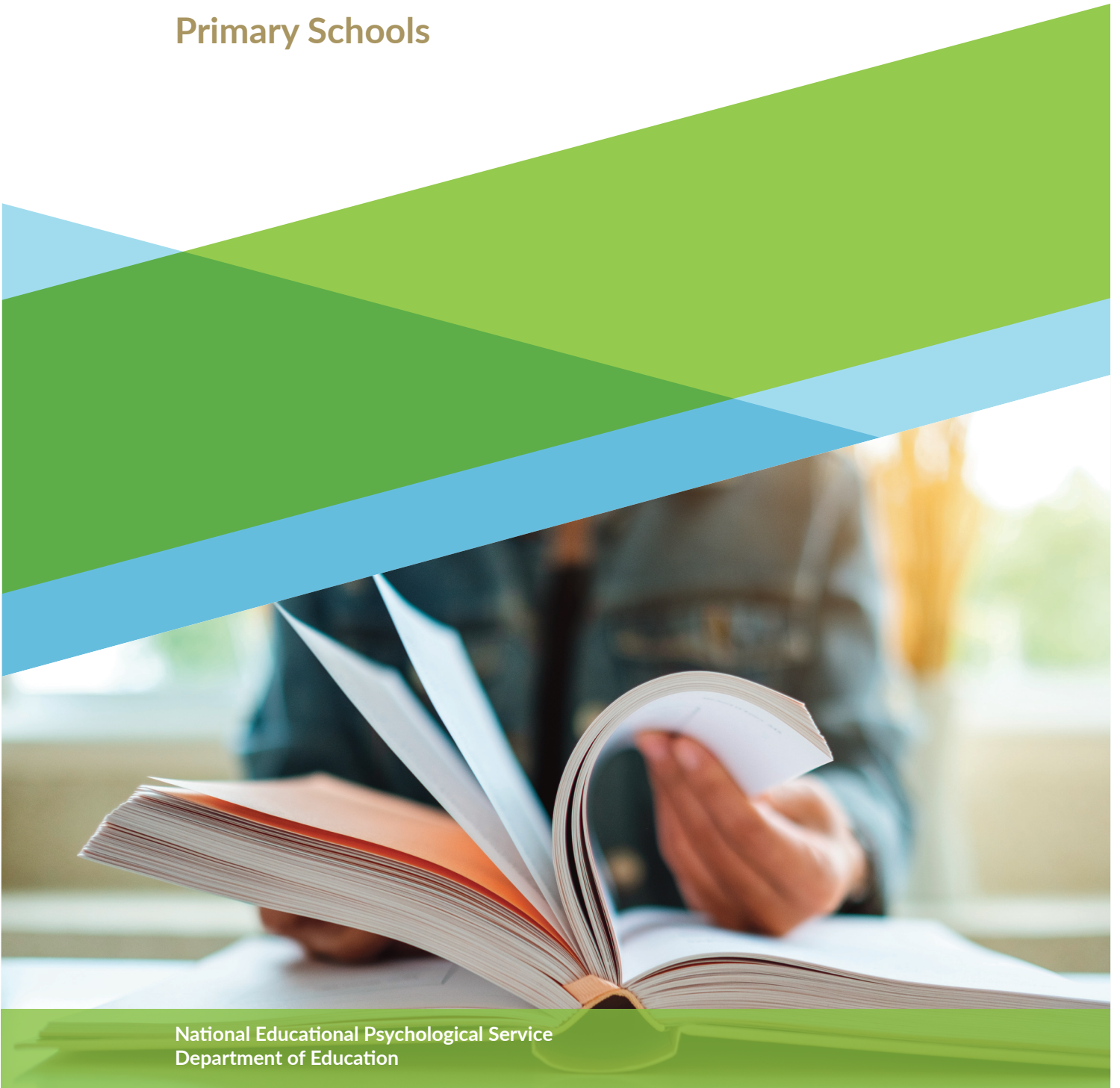


An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Síceolaíochta Oideachais
National Educational Psychological Service

Supporting Pupils with Literacy Difficulties Using the Continuum of Support

Primary Schools



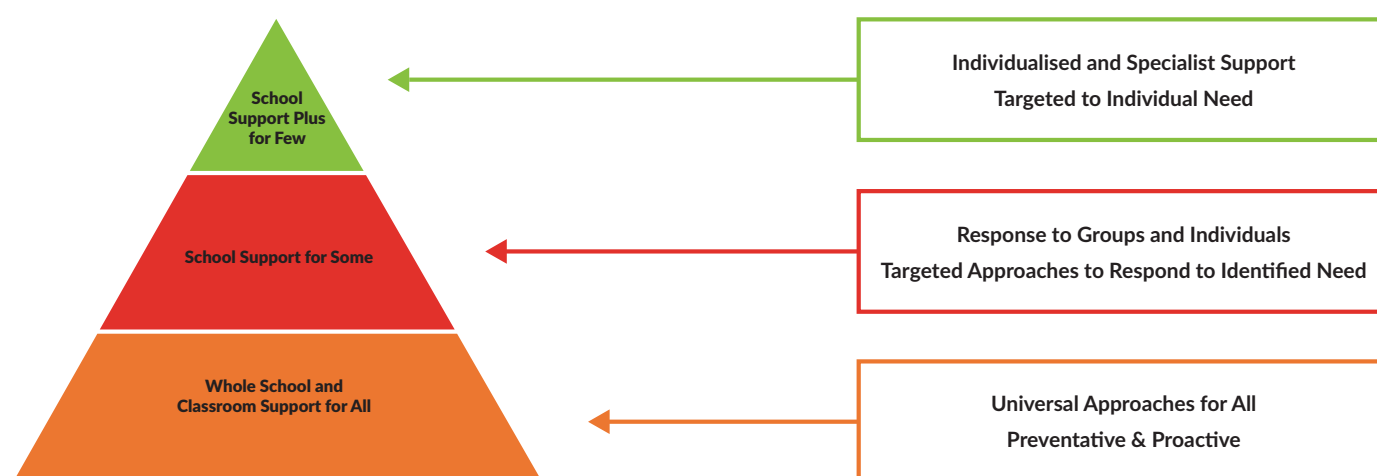
National Educational Psychological Service
Department of Education

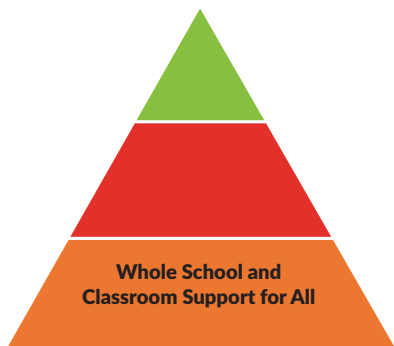
This document has been developed by the National Educational Psychological Service's Dyslexia Working Group. It is designed to support schools to implement a continuum-based approach to support pupils who experience difficulties with literacy, in all school contexts; English medium schools, Gaeltacht schools and Irish medium schools. This information is based on evidence-informed practice, and it is intended as a guide to support schools in meeting the needs of these pupils.

The Department of Education recommends that schools follow a Continuum of Support to identify and respond to pupils' learning needs, including learning needs related to literacy. Literacy difficulties refer to the problems that children may experience in acquiring accurate and/or fluent reading, reading comprehension and written language skills. The Continuum of Support provides a framework for schools to respond to a pupil's literacy difficulties, which may become apparent at any stage of their schooling. It is important to recognise that literacy difficulties exist on a continuum, from mild and/or transient to those which are more severe and persistent. Language and literacy skills are intrinsically interlinked. The Department's Primary Language Curriculum provides support to schools in L1 (primary language of the school) and L2 (second language of the school). While the majority of pupils should demonstrate progress following evidence-informed literacy intervention, a small percentage may experience difficulties that persist despite interventions provided in school. The Continuum of Support HERE is an approach that includes three levels or stages, for intervention, planning and review.

These include:

NEPS Continuum of Support Model





Whole School and Classroom Support for All

Whole School and Classroom Support for All involves a whole school approach to the teaching and learning of literacy that aims to meet the needs of all pupils.

Whole School Approaches include:

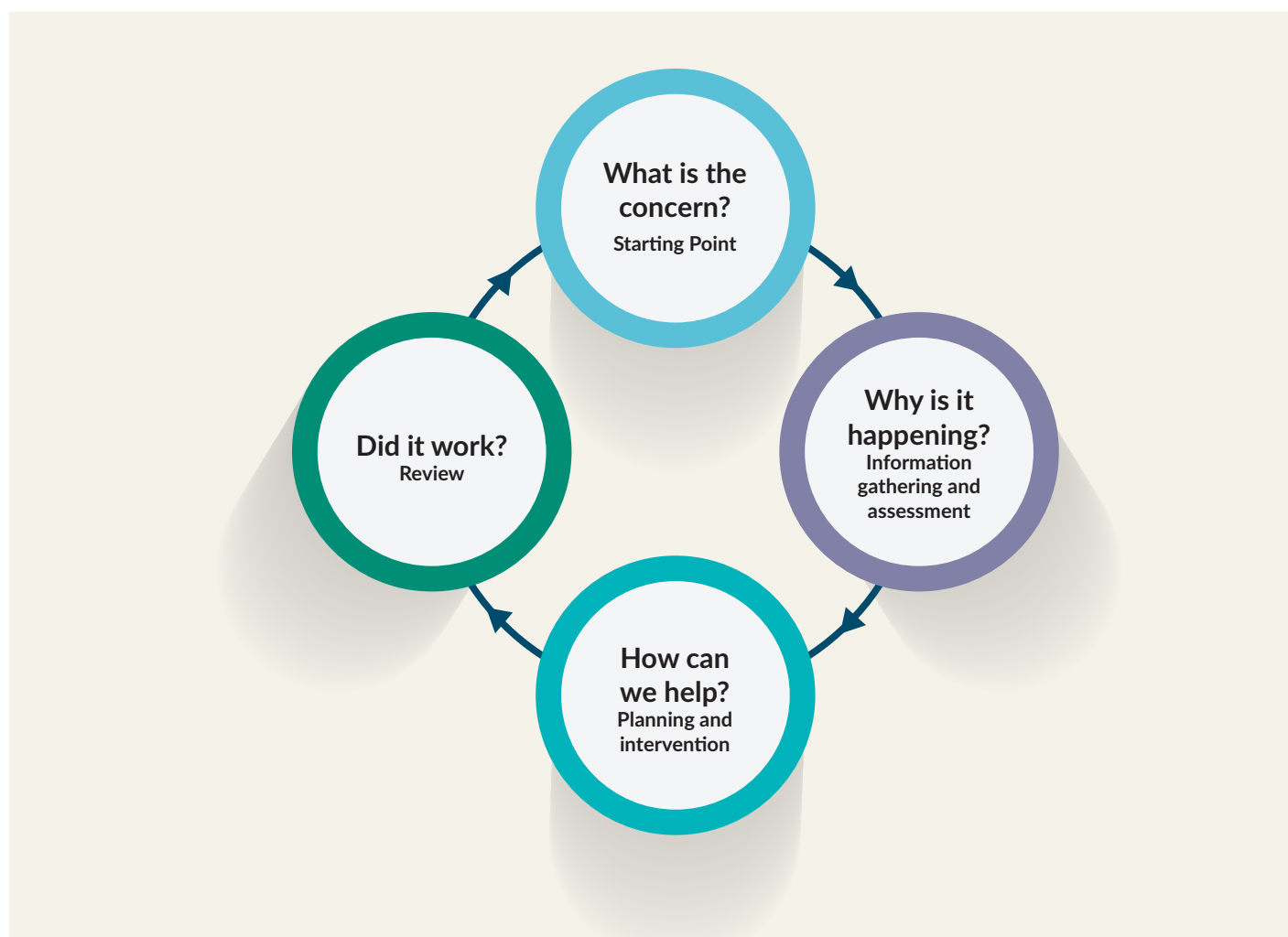
- School Policies and Planning - in relation to the development of literacy skills, including both L1 and L2, curriculum planning and assessment, identification and meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs.
- Approaches to teaching and learning - including, evidence-informed and differentiated approaches to teaching literacy, cross-curricular approaches to developing literacy skills, use of the Continuum of Support framework in conjunction with monitoring and review of a pupil's response to intervention (RTI).
- School Partnerships - with the pupil, parents, external agencies, e.g. NEPS, NCSE, HSE and community links.
- Learning Environment - creating positive learning environments that foster a sense of safety, calm, connectedness, self-efficacy, and promotes early intervention.

For more information on whole school approaches to supporting the needs of pupils with special educational needs, see *A Continuum of Support: Guidelines for Teachers*. [HERE](#)

Classroom Support for All

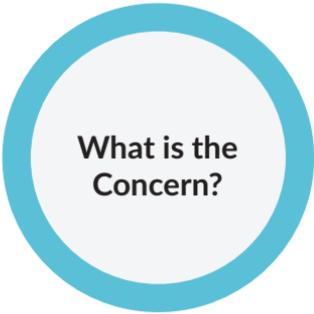
Classroom Support is the first response if a pupil is experiencing difficulties with the acquisition of literacy skills. The NEPS Framework for Practice, a problem-solving approach, can be applied at this stage which asks four key questions, as illustrated below:

NEPS Framework for Practice



Each of the four steps may be documented and recorded using a Classroom Support Plan¹, an example of which may be accessed [HERE](#).

¹ In the context of Gaeltacht schools and Irish medium schools, the problem solving approach may be applied to support in the development of literacy and language skills in Irish, as well as in English.



What is the Concern?

What is the concern? The first step is to establish a profile of the pupil's language and literacy skills including their strengths as well as any difficulties or areas of need. The use of curriculum-based literacy checklists and teacher observations may be useful approaches in identifying these areas. Key areas for literacy development are documented in the Primary Language Curriculum, which can be accessed [HERE](#). In considering language and literacy skills in primary Gaeltacht schools and Irish medium schools, it is particularly important to consider language and/or literacy difficulties and interventions in both the Irish and English language. Further information on the key components relevant to the teaching of literacy in the early years can be accessed in the NEPS publication *A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years* [HERE](#).



Why is it happening?

Why is it happening? Establish any potential causes that may be contributing to the difficulty that the pupil is experiencing. These factors may be related to language, the learning environment, social factors, and/or teaching and learning. Information-gathering at this stage may be supported through the use of checklists in the *Continuum of Support: Resource Pack for Teachers* [HERE](#). This also includes a useful Classroom Support Checklist.

The *Progression Continua* in the *Primary Language Curriculum* also provides a useful resource for classroom teachers for curriculum-based assessment of potential difficulties or delays in the development of language and literacy skills. This can be accessed [HERE](#).

A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years [HERE](#) contains an Annual Audit and Good Practice Review for Teachers. This is a good starting point and a useful resource for classroom teachers to assist planning intervention at classroom level.



How can we help? Based on the information gathered, the teacher draws up a plan, which outlines how literacy difficulties may best be addressed at classroom level. Intervention will be guided by the pupil's age and stage of development. It is important that parents/guardians are closely involved at this stage. Intervention should be recorded in the *Classroom Support Plan* [HERE](#).

For younger children, classroom-based intervention may focus on an approach that includes explicit teaching of a range of literacy skills. Intervention should be based on the areas of need identified through the information-gathering process. Further detailed information on the development and teaching of literacy in the early years is available in the NEPS publication *A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years* [HERE](#).

Cur Chuige Cothromaithe i leith Fhorbairt na Litearthachta i mBunranganna na Bunscoile is the product of a collaborative project undertaken by NEPS along with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG). This resource is wholly tailored to the teaching of literacy in the Irish language, focusing on children who receive their education through the medium of Irish. It is available on the Department of Education website and includes 16 short video clips of good practice in action. This document can be accessed [ANSEO](#).

Both *A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years* and *Cur Chuige Cothromaithe i leith Fhorbairt na Litearthachta i mBunranganna na Bunscoile* draw on international research, evidence based practice and samples of that practice in Irish primary schools, to give a coherent and comprehensive guide to teachers. These resources can be used by class teachers working with children from Junior Infants to First Class and are available [HERE](#) and [ANSEO](#) respectively.

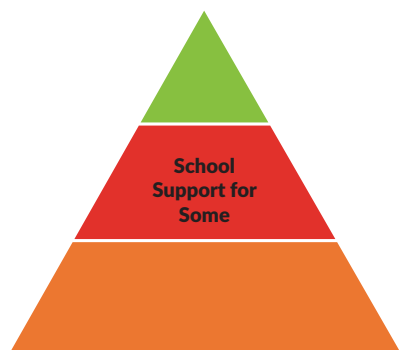
Intervention for older children may include a greater emphasis on the teaching of comprehension skills, digital literacy, as well as writing and spelling support. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) have a range of useful resources, including publications on Literacy and Learning to support older pupils with literacy difficulties. Links to these services may be accessed in the Appendix.



Did it work? A review of pupil progress should involve the class teacher, parents/guardians and the pupil (in an age-appropriate manner). The timing of this review should be agreed with teachers and parents/guardians as part of the Classroom Support Plan and documented in the Student Support File.

The review focuses on:

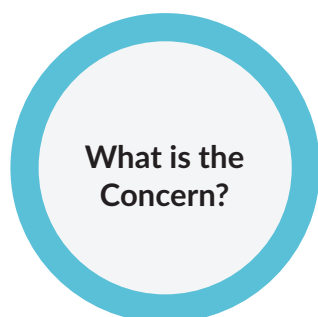
- A pupil's response to evidence informed intervention and progress made.
- The next steps required and agreed. For pupils with persistent literacy difficulties, it may be necessary to proceed to School Support – Support for Some, adopting the problem solving approach.



School Support – Support for Some

School Support involves a more targeted problem solving process, building on information gathered and interventions carried out under Classroom Support. This is necessary where the pupil has not made progress at the Classroom Support level.

Specific details of the process are outlined in the *Continuum of Support: Guidelines for Teachers*. [HERE](#)




What is the concern? During the review of a pupil's Classroom Support Plan, a decision may be made by the class teacher, in consultation with the SET, principal and parents, to initiate the School Support process. This may happen when more focused interventions/targets are considered necessary to enable the pupil to learn more effectively. This involves clarifying the teachers', pupil's and parents' concerns and reaching a shared understanding of the pupil's needs.



Why is it happening? Once the concerns have been clarified, it is important to understand why this is happening. It may be useful at this stage to gather more detailed information about potential underlying difficulties with the development of literacy skills. Assessment of a pupil's literacy difficulties may involve the use of school-based standardised and diagnostic tests of discrete literacy skills.² This may include phonological processing, phonic knowledge, word identification, reading fluency, reading comprehension and spelling.

There are many types of assessment, both formal and informal, that may be helpful in assessment of literacy needs. Section 4 of the *NEPS Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers - A Good Practice Guide* provides a comprehensive overview of assessment of literacy skills [HERE](#) and *A Balanced Approach to Literacy in the Early Years – NEPS Good Guide Practice Section 7 – Assessment for Teaching and Learning* [HERE](#).

² Caution is required when using and interpreting standardised English literacy tests, when English is not the primary language of the pupil.



How can we help?

How can we help? Intervention at this level should be based on addressing specific literacy needs identified through the assessment process. Where there are a wide range of needs identified, it may be necessary to prioritise areas of literacy to be targeted, based on the pupil's age and stage of development.

The NEPS publication *Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers* provides a comprehensive overview of a selection of evidence-informed approaches to teaching reading to those pupils who experience difficulties. This online resource is a comprehensive guide for teachers, particularly SETs, which outlines evidence-based approaches to teaching reading to struggling readers. The guide covers the age range 6 to 18 years. It encompasses all pupils with reading difficulties. It includes:

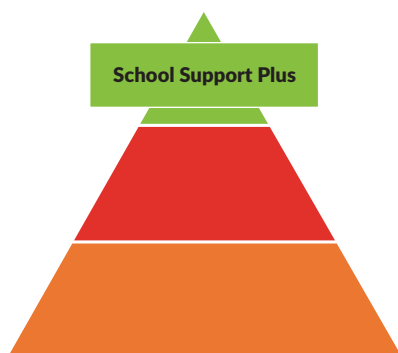
- How best to organise learning support for struggling readers
- Information about interventions that have been found to be effective in Irish schools

A range of resources to support literacy teaching can be found [HERE](#).



Did it work?

Did it work? It is important that progress is monitored, as adaptations and adjustments will need to be made, based on how a pupil responds to an intervention. Information on support and intervention should be recorded in the Support Plan. If, following an agreed period of intervention and review, the pupil has not made sufficient progress, it may be necessary to proceed to the next level of the Continuum of Support - School Support Plus.



School Support Plus – Support For a Few

At the School Support Plus level, the pupil continues to experience significant difficulties with the acquisition of basic literacy skills related to one or more areas including reading, spelling and writing. Literacy difficulties at this level are significant and may impact negatively on pupils' meaningful participation, wellbeing and access to the curriculum. These difficulties have persisted, despite targeted evidence-informed

interventions already implemented at the Classroom and School Support levels. Pupils who present with this level of literacy difficulties are likely to require continuing additional support involving the SET to access and participate in the curriculum in a meaningful way.

School Support Plus will generally involve a more detailed problem-solving process, including more individualised and specific school-led assessment and targeted intervention.



What is the concern? Support at this level may involve consultation and/or further assessment in collaboration with teachers and parents, to explore why a pupil continues to experience significant difficulties despite targeted intervention, as documented in the Student Support Plan. Specific information on the process of information gathering, assessment and planning at this stage may be found in the *Continuum of Support Guidelines for Teachers* [HERE](#) .




Why is it happening? Assessment at this level builds on information gathered as part of the problem-solving process at previous levels, but may be more targeted towards specific areas of literacy skills development. This may include more detailed assessment of some or all of the following literacy skills: phonological processing, letter-sound knowledge, word reading skills, reading accuracy, reading fluency, reading comprehension, as well as spelling and handwriting skills.

At this level, assessment should be informed by a wide range of information gathered from a variety of sources (including the pupil's current learning, social and emotional needs), as detailed in the Student Support Plan. NEPS encourages schools to use the problem-solving approach whereby each school takes responsibility for initial assessment, identification of need, educational planning and intervention for pupils. NEPS, in consultation with teachers, parents and pupils, may play a role in the problem-solving process at this level.

Consideration of the identification/description of literacy difficulties, such as dyslexia, takes place within both the Continuum of Support problem-solving approach and the pupil's response to intervention as documented in the Student Support File. NEPS understands dyslexia as an umbrella term for significant learning difficulties which primarily affect the skills involved in accurate and/or fluent word reading and/or spelling/sustained written work. Such difficulties have persisted, despite access to learning opportunities that are effective and appropriate for most other children.

Literacy difficulties, including dyslexia, may look different at different stages of development. For example, in younger children, difficulties are often more evident in learning and applying phonological skills. In older pupils, literacy difficulties may be more apparent with spelling and/or producing sustained written work. As pupils progress through school, literacy difficulties may impact more generally on their ability to access text books and to demonstrate their knowledge and learning. The pupil's stage of literacy development will inform intervention.



How can we help?

How can we help? Intervention at this level should reflect a cumulative, sequential and individualised approach, targeting specific component literacy skills, and combining approaches to suit learning needs. The development of vocabulary, concept development, reading comprehension and writing skills may become important areas to target for older pupils. Further information may be accessed [HERE](#).



Did it work?

Did it work? Monitoring and review of a pupil's response to intervention is a key element in understanding why a difficulty is happening and what further supports may be required. This is a collaborative process involving the parents, pupils and teachers. NEPS psychologists may work in collaboration with teachers, parents and pupils through consultation.

This document has outlined an evidence informed, continuum-based approach to guide schools supporting pupils with literacy needs in schools. The following appendix provides further links to information and other useful resources which you may find useful.

Appendix - Resources

Department of Education Literacy Supports

- The PDST publication on the six key components of **Literacy Developments in the Primary Classroom** provides some useful tips for fostering the development of literacy skills suitable for older pupils. This can be accessed
<https://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Literacy%20Development%20in%20the%20Primary%20Classroom.pdf>
- **Whole School Approaches see Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support: Guidelines for Teachers**
<https://assets.gov.ie/40642/674c98d5e72d48b7975f60895b4e8c9a.pdf>
- **NEPS provides a helpful guide on assessment of literacy difficulties**
<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/97aa18-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-resources-and-public/#literacy-resources>
- **A Balanced Approach to Literacy Development in the Early Years,**
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/cf27b-a-balanced-approach-to-literacy-development-in-the-early-years/>
- **Balanced Approach - As Gaeilge**
Cur Chuige Cothromaithe i leith Fhorbairt na Litearthachta i mBunranganna na Bunscoile
 NEPS along with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta (COGG).
<https://www.google.com/search?q=As+Gaeilge+Cur+Chuige+Cothromaithe+i+leith+Fhorbairt+na+Litearthachta+i+mBunranganna+na+Bunscoi>
- **Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers –**
<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/97aa18-national-educational-psychological-service-neps-resources-and-public/#literacy-resources>
- **Primary Language Curriculum -**
<https://www.curriculumonline.ie>
- **Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile -**
<https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/?lang=ga-ie>

Relevant Circulars

- The Department of Education provides circulars on standardised testing and other information on resources to support the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy matters

CPD for Teachers

NEPS

- NEPS offer courses through local Education Centres to familiarise teachers with *A Balanced Approach for Literacy Development in the Early Years* and the *Effective Intervention for Struggling Readers* resources.
- Schools may also consult with their assigned psychologist for support in this area.

National Council for Special Education – Courses for Teachers

1 day seminars in this area, which can be accessed at the following link <https://ncse.ie/for-schools/connect-teacher-professional-learning-events-catalogue>

