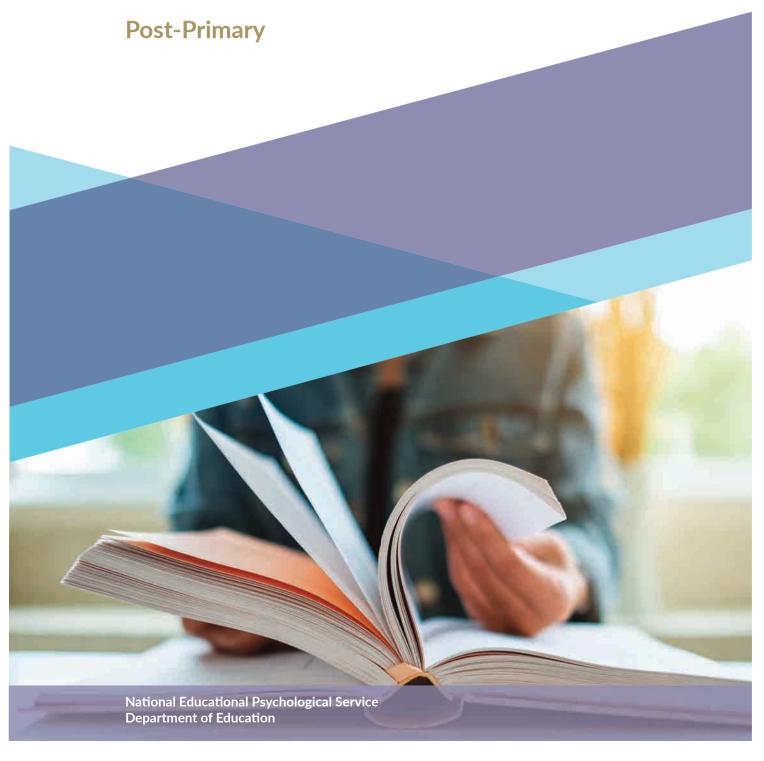


# Supporting Students with Literacy Difficulties Using the Continuum of Support

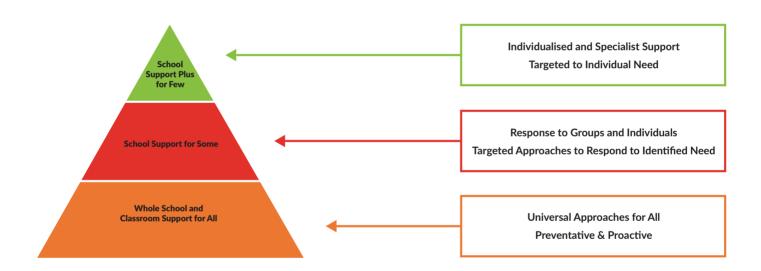


This document has been developed by the National Educational Psychological Service's Dyslexia Working Group. It is designed to support schools to implement a continuum-based approach to support students who experience difficulties with literacy in all school contexts; English medium schools, Gaeltacht 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 students.

The Department of Education recommends that schools follow a Continuum of Support to identify and respond to students' learning needs, including learning needs related to literacy. Literacy difficulties refer to the problems that students 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 student's literacy difficulties, which may become apparent at any stage of their schooling, and provides a pathway for schools to respond to their needs. 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. While the majority of students should demonstrate progress following evidence-informed literacy intervention, a small percentage may experience difficulties that persist despite evidence-informed 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/Subject 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 students.

## Whole School Approaches include:

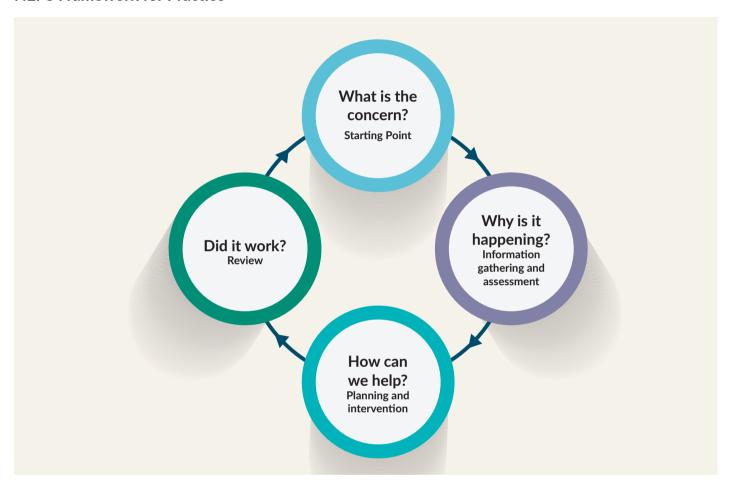
- School Policies and Planning in relation to the development of literacy skills including both L1 (primary language of the school/student) and L2 (second language of the school/student), curriculum planning and assessment, identification and meeting the needs of students with special educational needs.
- 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 student's
  response to intervention (RTI).
- School Partnerships with the student, 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 and self-efficacy.

Whole School Approaches to supporting the literacy needs of all students, including those with Special Educational Needs, are informed by the principles and skills underpinning the A Framework for the Junior Cycle HERE, A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers HERE, and Guidelines for Post-Primary schools Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools HERE.

# Classroom/Subject Support for All

Classroom/Subject Support is the first response if a student is experiencing difficulties with 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**



Using the Continuum of Support framework, schools can identify students' educational needs, including academic, social and emotional needs, as well as needs associated with physical, sensory, language and communication difficulties. The problem-solving framework emphasises the importance of looking at a student's needs in context, and provides useful resources to support this (for example, Learning Environment Checklist, Teacher Checklist for Whole-Class Structures and Support) HERE.



What is the Concern? The first step is to develop an understanding of the student's language and literacy skills, including their strengths, as well as any difficulties or areas of need. In considering language and literacy skills in postprimary 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. Many students will have their special educational needs identified prior to their transfer to post-primary school. It is important for schools to gather information on students' learning from primary schools and parents in order to plan supports, and to ensure continuity and progression in students' education. Subjects teachers may wish to liaise with the SET Team as part of the information-gathering process. The Guidelines for Post-Primary School on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools provides further guidance on information that may be gathered to identify needs at this stage HERE.



Why is it happening? Establish any potential causes that may be contributing to the difficulty that the student is experiencing in the post-primary setting. 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 for Post-Primary Schools: Resource Pack for Teachers HERE. This publication includes a comprehensive Learning Environment Checklist, which may provide a broader understanding of factors contributing to literacy difficulties. Formative and summative assessment strategies, as those outlined in Chapter 5 of A Framework for the Junior Cycle, may also provide additional information for subject teachers HERE. Whole group/year screening of literacy skills may also provide further useful information that may help to explain difficulties in this area. Circular 0067/2020 (Advice on the use of assessment instruments/tests for Guidance or for additional and special educational needs (SEN) in post-primary schools) provides advice on the use of assessments instruments/tests in Post-Primary Schools<sup>1</sup> HERE.

It should be noted that caution is required when using and interpreting standardised English literacy tests, where English is not the primary language of the student.

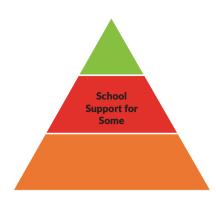


How can we help? The subject teacher considers how to differentiate the learning programme effectively to accommodate the needs of all students. Further information on this process may be accessed from the Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (Effective Teaching and Learning: The Role of the Subject Teacher) HERE.



**Did it work?** Subject teachers monitor and review student response to adjustments and differentiated approaches to teaching and learning. Where students continue to experience difficulties, subject teachers may engage in further consultation with the Form Tutors, Year Heads, SET team and/or the Student Support Team to consider the student's progress and next steps required.

For some students, difficulties may be persistent and it may be necessary to proceed to School Support – Support for Some, adopting the problem solving approach. This decision is taken in consultation with the school's SET Team, the student, and their parents/guardians.



# School Support - Support for Some

School Support-Support for Some involves a more targeted problem solving process, building on information gathered and adjustments/differentiated teaching and learning approaches carried out by Subject Teachers. This is necessary where the student has not made the expected progress at a Classroom/Subject Support level.

Specific details of this process are outlined in the *Continuum of Support*: Guidelines for Teachers Link HERE.



What is the concern? Following a review of a student's progress at Whole School/Support for All level, a decision may be made to initiate the School Support process. This may happen if more focused interventions/targets are considered necessary to enable the student to learn more effectively. Consultation with all those concerned is central to decision making to clarify the teachers', students' and parents/ guardians' concerns and expectations, to reach a shared understanding of the student's needs.



Why is this 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 development of literacy skills. There are many types of assessment, both formal and informal, that may be helpful in assessment of literacy needs. This may involve the use of formal assessment strategies, such as school-based standardised and diagnostic tests of discrete literacy skills², as well as assessment of word-reading accuracy, reading fluency, phonological processing, reading comprehension and spelling. Informal assessment will also inform intervention, for example, miscue/error analysis of reading and writing samples, and of fluency and organisation of written work.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Gaeltacht and Irish medium schools should note that there is limited availability of standardised Irish discrete literacy assessment tools.

Further information on assessment of literacy needs at this level may be accessed from:

- Department of Education Circular 0067/2020 Advice on the Use of Assessment Instruments/Tests for Guidance or for additional and special educational needs (SEN) in postprimary schools HERE.
- Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools, page 10 HERE.
- The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) publication *Post-Primary Literacy Resources for Teachers* contains useful checklists of literacy skills including speaking, listening and writing checklists, which may be helpful HERE.
- Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers Section 3 and Section 4 Assessment and Measuring Progress HERE.



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 student's age and stage of development.

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

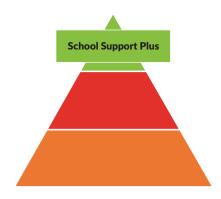
- How best to organise learning support for struggling readers
- Information about interventions that have been found to be effective in Irish schools

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), also have a comprehensive suite of literacy resources to inform support and intervention across all areas of literacy HERE.

The PDST publication, *Post-Primary Literacy Resources for Teachers*, also contains useful advice on strategies to support students in the development of literacy skills HERE.



**Did it work?** It is important that progress is monitored, as adaptations and adjustments will need to be made, based on how a student responds to an intervention. Information on support and intervention are recorded in the Support Plan HERE. If, following an agreed period of intervention and review, the student has not made sufficient progress, it may be necessary to proceed to the next level of the Continuum of Support - School Support Plus. Decision making in relation to the level of support required is a collaborative and consultative process, involving the teachers supporting the student, the student themselves, and their parent/guardians.



# School Support Plus - Support for a Few

At the School Support Plus level, the student continues to experience significant difficulties with 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 students' meaningful participation, wellbeing, and access to the curriculum. These difficulties have persisted, despite targeted evidence-informed interventions already

implemented at the Classroom/Subject and School Support for Some levels. Students 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, parents, and the student to explore why significant difficulties persist 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 Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools 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, lettersound knowledge, word-reading skills, reading accuracy, reading fluency, reading comprehension, as well as spelling and writing skills.

At this level, assessment should be informed by a wide range of information gathered from a variety of sources (including the student'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 students. NEPS, in consultation with teachers, parents and students, 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 student'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 students.

Literacy difficulties, including dyslexia, may look different at different stages of development. In older students, difficulties may be more apparent with reading fluency, spelling and/or producing sustained written work. Literacy difficulties may impact more generally on students' ability to access text books, and to demonstrate their knowledge and learning. The student's stage of literacy development will inform intervention.



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 students. Further information may be accessed in *Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers: A Good Practice Guide for Teachers* HERE.



**Did it work?** Monitoring and review of a student'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, students and teachers. NEPS psychologists may work in collaboration with teachers, parents and students, through consultation.

This document has outlined an evidence-informed, continuum-based approach to guide schools supporting students 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**

- Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools gov.ie - Supporting Pupils and Students with Special Educational Needs -Guidelines for Schools (www.gov.ie)
- Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers gov.ie Special Education Needs a Continuum of Support (www.gov.ie)
- Special Educational Needs A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools Resource Pack for Teachers gov.ie - Special Education Needs a Continuum of Support (www.gov.ie)
- A Framework for the Junior Cycle (Chapter 5 What Will Assessment Look Like? ) A Framework for the Junior Cycle (ncca.ie)
- Professional Development Service for Teachers Post-Primary Literacy Resources for Teachers Literacy and SSE | PDST
- NEPS provides a helpful guide on assessment of literacy difficulties https://www.education.ie/en/Education-Staff/Information/NEPS-Literacy-Resource/NEPS-Resource-Assessing-Literacy-Difficulties.pdf
- Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers gov.ie Effective Interventions for Struggling Readers A Good Practice Guide for Teachers (www.gov.ie)
- National Council for Special Education Literacy, Language and Learning Resources and Publications Literacy, Language & Learning Resources & Publications | NBSS
- An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta & Gaelscolaíochta provides resources and support materials for Gaeltacht schools and Gaelcholáisti COGG | An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta
- Scoilnet's Post Primary Hub includes information and links to a range of resources Home -Scoilnet

#### **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 gov.ie - Advice on the use of assessment instruments/tests for Guidance or for additional and special educational needs (SEN) in post-primary schools (www.gov.ie)

