

## **“If my child is struggling with reading, spelling or writing might they be dyslexic?”**

**Andrew Meynell – SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator)**

Dyslexia tends to be used as an umbrella term covering a range of reading difficulties.

Traditionally dyslexia recognises that there is a significant difference between what the pupil is able to do in terms of reading, writing and spelling and their actual level of ability.

If your child is having difficulties with literacy it may not be dyslexia. However, the same programmes that are suitable for children with dyslexia are also good for children who struggle with reading, writing and spelling. Pupils with literacy difficulties at Airy Hill will receive the same type of support as those with dyslexia from their teachers and teaching assistants. For example, the NESSY program used by many pupils at Airy Hill was written for dyslexic pupils but most of the children who use and benefit from the program do not have dyslexia.

### ***How can I help my child with their reading?***

1. Teaching reading will only help.

Sometimes, parents are told early teaching is harmful, but it isn't true. You can't introduce literacy too early. There are hundreds of studies showing the benefits of reading to your children when they are young.

2. Talk to your children (a lot).

Reading is a language activity; studies have shown that exposing your child to a variety of words helps in her development of literacy skills.

3. Read to your children.

Research shows benefits for children as young as 9-months-old, and it could be effective even earlier than that. Reading to children exposes them to richer vocabulary than they usually hear from the adults who speak to them, and can have positive impacts on their language, ability, and later literacy achievement.

4. Have them tell you a “story.”

One good way to introduce children to literacy is to take their dictation. Have them recount an experience or make up a story. Write it as it is being told, and then read it aloud. Point at the words when you read them, or point at them when your child is trying to read the story.

5. Teach phonemic awareness.

Young children don't hear the sounds within words. Thus, they hear “dog,” but not the “duh”-“aw”-“guh.” To become readers, they have to learn to hear these sounds (or phonemes). Play language games with your child. For instance, say a word, perhaps her name, and then change it by one phoneme: Jen-Pen, Jen-Hen, Jen-Men. Or, just break a word apart: chair... ch-ch-ch-air.

6. Teach phonics (letter names and their sounds).

You can't sound out words or write them without knowing the letter sounds. All schools teach the letters, parents can teach them, too. Keep the lessons brief and fun, no more than 5–10 minutes for young children. Understanding the different developmental stages of reading and writing skills will help to guide your lessons and expectations.

7. Listen to your child read.

When your child starts bringing books home from school, have them read to you. If it doesn't sound good (mistakes, choppy reading), let them read it again. Or read it to them, and then have him/her try to read it themselves. Studies show that this kind of repeated oral reading makes students better readers, even when it is done at home.

8. Promote writing.

Literacy involves reading and writing. Having books and magazines available for your child is a good idea, but it's also helpful to have pencils, crayons, markers, and paper. Encourage your child to write. One way to do this is to write notes or short letters to him/her.

9. Ask questions.

When your child reads, get them to retell the story or information. If it's a story, ask who it was about and what happened. If it's an informational text, have your child explain what it was about and how it worked, or what its parts were. Reading involves not just sounding out words, but thinking about and remembering ideas and events. Improving reading comprehension skills early will prepare them for subsequent success in more difficult texts.

10. Make reading a regular activity in your home.