

Early identification of literacy learning needs

A suggestion for implementing the strategy

'Support early literacy development through a structured literacy approach' from the Guide:

[Dyslexia and learning](#)

Includes:

Take action early

What to look for

Recognising reading and writing difficulties

Identifying learners needing support

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Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Dyslexia and learning](#)

Strategy: [Support early literacy development through a structured literacy approach](#)

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Date

17 September 2025

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inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/dyslexia-and-learning/early-identification-of-literacy-learning-needs

Take action early

If the persistent achievement gap between dyslexic and typical readers is to be narrowed, or even closed, reading interventions must be implemented early, when children are still developing the basic foundation for reading acquisition.

Emilio Ferrer, Bennet Shaywitz, John Holahan, Karen Marchione, Reissa Michaels, and Sally Shaywitz

Source:

[Achievement gap in reading is present as early as first grade and persists through adolescence](#)

[https://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476\(15\)00823-9/fulltext](https://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476(15)00823-9/fulltext)

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What to look for

Notice those students who are having difficulty with phonological awareness tasks, learning letters, basic sounding out of words, and word recognition.

This is part of a larger video.



Video hosted on Youtube http://youtu.be/ogks_oVVPok

No captions or transcript

Source:

[Tanya Forbes \(AUS\)](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDjuuqKjBNVDpgqp14IMSSA/featured>

Recognising reading and writing difficulties

The simple view of reading

	Oral language comprehension – Listening	
Word recognition – decoding	Competent reader – is average or above in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• decoding• listening comprehension• reading comprehension	Specific comprehension difficulties <ul style="list-style-type: none">• average or above in decoding• below average in listening comprehension• below average in reading comprehension
	Reading difficulty (maybe dyslexia) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• average or above listening comprehension• below average decoding• below average reading comprehension	Mixed reading difficulties – is below average in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• decoding• listening comprehension• reading comprehension

The simple view of writing

	Ideas	
Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many interesting ideas• Accurate spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accurate spelling• Lack of ideas
	Writing difficulty (maybe dyslexia) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many interesting ideas• Inaccurate spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inaccurate spelling• Lack of ideas

Adapted from:
Dymock, S. & Nicholson, T. (2015). *The New Zealand Dyslexia Handbook*. NZCER Press, Wellington, New Zealand.
Gough, P. B. & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7(1).

Source:
[Adapted from The New Zealand dyslexia handbook](#)
<https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/new-zealand-dyslexia-handbook>

[View full image \(311 KB\)](#)

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Identifying learners needing support

The initial trigger for action is the child needing noticeably more reading support than his or her peers.

Step 1: Notice those making slow progress despite receiving high-quality literacy teaching – especially in teaching word recognition and language comprehension in keeping with [the simple view of reading](#).

Step 2: Undertake further assessment, planning, and intervention with parents, whānau, and carers. Teaching is likely to include [Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 interventions](#). It is reasonable to expect most children to respond well to these.

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Key elements of early intervention

- 1 Explicit teaching in phonological awareness – teaching the ability to hear, recognise, and manipulate sounds that make up spoken words, for example, identifying rhyming sounds and clapping out syllables.
- 2 Strong focus on phonological decoding and word-level work.
- 3 Supported and independent reading of progressively more difficult texts.
- 4 Practice comprehension strategies while reading texts.
- 5 Systematic, focused teaching.

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Useful resources



Signs of dyslexia

Descriptions of learners in early years, primary school, secondary school, and in adults.

Publisher: The British Dyslexia Association

[Visit website](#)



Three steps in screening for dyslexia

The New Zealand Dyslexia Handbook outlines three steps in screening for dyslexia. This screening approach is recommended by the Ministry of Education. The steps and tests listed on pages 61–75 are listed with links to the tests.

[Download PDF \(70 KB\)](#)

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