



ADVOCATING FOR YOUR DYSLEXIC CHILD IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

When advocating for your child, it's important to approach the process with appreciation and understanding for the challenges teachers face as they transition to the new Structured Literacy mandate. For many educators, this will be their first time engaging deeply with Structured Literacy approaches, which require both professional learning and adjustments to their existing teaching practices. Recognising the time, effort, and dedication teachers are investing in this transition helps foster a collaborative and positive relationship, which is essential for your child's success.

The first 2–3 weeks of Term 1 are particularly busy, as teachers focus on conducting assessments, planning lessons, and settling students into routines. If you're requesting a meeting, we recommend emailing the teacher at least a week in advance. In your email, outline the topics you'd like to discuss and include any relevant information, such as reports, student profile that includes background details about your child's learning needs, or helpful links to resources.

Providing this information ahead of time not only shows consideration for the teacher's workload but also helps maintain a good working relationship with them. A positive and respectful approach encourages open communication and collaboration, which is key to ensuring the best outcomes for your child. Additionally, giving the teacher time to prepare allows for a more productive meeting, enabling well-informed decisions to be made for your child on the spot rather than requiring additional follow-up meetings.

By balancing your advocacy efforts with patience and understanding, you can build a strong partnership with your child's teacher while ensuring they receive the support and Structured Literacy integration they need to thrive.

Understanding Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that affects reading, spelling, and writing. It is neurological in origin and often runs in families. Children with dyslexia typically experience difficulties with phonological processing, making it hard for them to connect sounds (phonemes) with their corresponding letters (graphemes). However, with the right support and instruction, children with dyslexia can become successful readers and writers. For more detailed information please refer to [WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?](#) and [WHAT IS THE SCIENCE OF READING?](#)

Why Structured Literacy Matters

Structured Literacy is an evidence-based approach supported by the International Dyslexic Association. It benefits all learners, particularly those with dyslexia. It includes explicit, systematic, and cumulative instruction in:

- Phonology: Understanding sounds in spoken language.
- Sound-Symbol Association: Connecting sounds to letters.
- Syllables and Stress Patterns: Learning syllable types and spelling patterns for decoding and encoding.
- Morphology: Studying word parts like prefixes, roots, and suffixes.
- Syntax: Understanding sentence structure and grammar.
- Semantics: Building vocabulary and comprehension.

This method ensures that instruction is direct, clear, and sequential, helping children with dyslexia build strong foundational skills.

For more detailed information please refer to [WHAT IS STRUCTURED LITERACY?](#)

Questions to Guide Your Advocacy

If you have concerns about your child or student and plan to meet with their teacher to collaborate on support strategies, it's essential to ask the right questions and gather relevant information. This investigative process allows you to identify gaps, provide solutions, and work effectively with the school.

This can be achieved by asking targeted questions and reviewing assessments conducted either by yourself or by the school. As a parent, you play a vital role in ensuring your child receives the necessary support. Below are some recommended questions to help you advocate effectively:

1. **Instruction Methods:** What approach does the school use to teach reading, writing, and spelling? Is it Balanced Literacy or Structured Literacy? While no school should still be using Balanced Literacy, it is important to understand that this is a transitional period, and some schools may take longer to fully adopt Structured Literacy.
2. **Ask About Teacher Training:** Inquire whether your child's teacher has training in Structured Literacy, particularly from the approved Structured Literacy PLD list. While foundational training is becoming more common, expertise for Tier 3 learners often requires additional professional development.
3. Has anyone in your school registered for or has completed the [Accelerated Literacy Learning programme \(ALL\)](#) to support struggling learners?
4. **Request Individualised Support:** Ask the school about targeted or individualised funded interventions in school for dyslexic learners. This includes one-on-one or small group instruction focusing on your child's specific needs. If they can provide intervention, ask for more information. What types of intervention is it, what areas does it cover?
5. Ask the school about any referrals to different learning supports available in your area like RTLBs, LSC's or RTLits?
6. **Inquire About Resources:** Ask about the materials and methods used, such as what scope and sequence is being adopted schoolwide for reading and spelling and how is it being adapted for dyslexic students. What kind of decodable books, or other resources (phonemic awareness, listening and reading comprehension, writing, handwriting, and oral language) are being used to support older students who are dyslexic?
7. **Adjustments for Assessments:** Ensure the school provides accommodations for mainstream assessments, such as extra time, alternative formats, or technology aids
8. **Monitor Progress:** Find out how the school tracks your child's progress. What assessments are used for reading, phonemic awareness, handwriting, spelling, and writing plus reading and listening comprehension? How is this data used to adjust instruction? Ask what assessments your child has completed and if you can see them.
9. **Alphabet Knowledge:** Does your child know the first 26 sounds of the alphabet? Can they write the letters when they hear the sounds? Can they also say the sounds when they see the letters?
10. **Spelling Patterns:** Which patterns can your child read and spell confidently?
11. **Handwriting and Writing Skills:** Is your child able to correctly form all their letters? Has your child been completing writing tasks at school? Can they write sentences and paragraphs, understanding proper structure?

The Importance of Assessment

Assessment is critical for identifying your child's strengths and gaps in literacy skills. The purpose of assessments is to:

- Evaluate your child's ability to connect sounds with letters (sound-symbol association).
- Determine phonological awareness and its impact on reading and spelling.
- Identify specific spelling patterns and writing skills your child needs to develop.
- Assess your child's handwriting skills.
- Evaluate your child's ability to comprehend what they hear or/and read.
- Guide instruction and intervention.

You can find out more information about individual assessments here [INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN \(IEP\)/SCHOOL DISCUSSION](#) and [IEP/School Meeting Update](#)

The New English Curriculum

The new English curriculum now provides more guidance on what should be covered each year your child is in school. It is important to note for children who have dyslexia and/or other challenges. These guidelines may not be suitable goals for year to year right now. Please use these as a reference or a scope sequence right now to understand what goals can be set and what goals you are working towards.

Resources and Support

More can be found on the DEB (Dyslexia Evidence Based) website and support group on Facebook in New Zealand. The DEB advocates for evidence-based interventions for dyslexia. Visit the website at www.deb.co.nz for information on:

- Free assessments a parent or teacher can use
- An example of a structured literacy lesson for intervention.
- Understanding what dyslexia is.
- Education and school-based supports including IEP and school meetings.
- Professional resources for teachers and parents.

For more detailed information please refer to the [RESOURCE HUB](#)

Next Steps for Parents

- Look over any schoolbooks or schoolwork you have at home and start asking specific questions about your child's reading and writing skills as listed above.
- Consider creating a **Student Profile** to introduce your child to any new teachers.
- **Collaborate with your child's Teachers:** Ask for a meeting and build a partnership with your child's teacher and any learning support at the school to ensure a consistent approach to instruction.
- **Seek Professional Support:** Consider additional cognitive assessments or tutoring from specialists trained in Structured Literacy.

By asking the right questions and advocating for evidence-based interventions, you can empower your dyslexic child to succeed in literacy and beyond.

It's important to note that many schools face significant challenges in providing adequate support for all the children who need it. Often, the root of this issue lies not within the schools themselves but with broader systemic limitations, such as insufficient funding and resources allocated by the Ministry of Education (MoE). While schools are doing their best to implement the new Structured Literacy mandate, they may still struggle to meet the needs of every child due to these constraints.

This situation presents a valuable opportunity for parents to step up as advocates, not just for their own child but for broader improvements in learning support. During your discussions with the school, consider asking how you can collaborate with them to advocate for increased funding and resources. This might include writing letters to the MoE, joining or forming parent advocacy groups, or raising awareness within your local community. Additionally, consider joining the school's Board of Trustees. Serving on the board gives you a direct voice regarding decisions about resource allocation, curriculum priorities, and funding needs. If joining the board isn't feasible, you can still attend board meetings, ask questions, or write to the board with your concerns. Engaging with the board in any of these ways ensures that the challenges faced by children needing additional support are heard and addressed at a governance level.

By working together with your school and actively participating in advocacy efforts, you can help highlight the need for better support structures. This not only strengthens your partnership with the school but also contributes to systemic change, ensuring that all children, including your own, have access to the resources they need to succeed.
