



# Students with Dyslexia in an Irish-medium school

## Advice for Parents

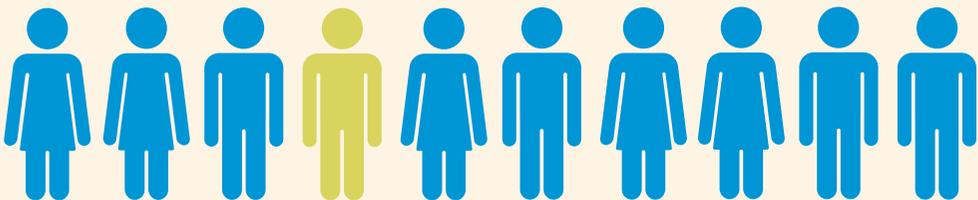


This factsheet has been developed by Gaeloideachas in collaboration with the Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI) and is based on current national and international research, which informs best practice in schools and policy formulation globally in relation to children identified with Dyslexia. This factsheet is intended as a guide only.

Dyslexia, by its nature, presents as an array of different strengths and weaknesses in individuals with challenges ranging from mild to severe. Therefore, parents should be mindful of any “one model fits all” type of advice. Teachers and parents may wish to identify the strategies that will work best for their child’s unique profile and educational setting.

## What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty which affects how accurately and quickly someone can read and spell. About one in ten people (10%) have dyslexia. Some people have a mild form that might not be noticed, and others have severe dyslexia. People born with dyslexia learn in a different way to others.



Looked at from the level of the brain, people with dyslexia may be slower in making the connection between the sounds of a language and the letters for those sounds. This makes it harder for them to recognize short words or to sound out longer ones. Because it takes longer to work out what the word is, the meaning can be lost. It is no surprise then that people with dyslexia find it hard to spell correctly. Some people with dyslexia also find it hard to get their meaning across in writing and sometimes even when speaking because they can’t recall words as quickly as other people.

While dyslexia exists in all languages, the way in which dyslexia affects reading and spelling depends on the orthography (writing system) of the language. The difficulty of an orthography depends on

- (i) how complex it is (how many ways there are to spell a given sound) and
- (ii) how consistent it is (how many ways there are to read a word or string of letters).

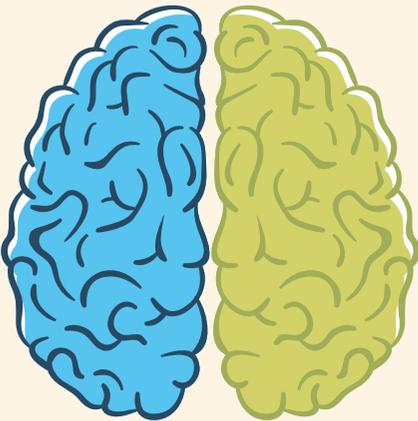
English is very complex and inconsistent, which makes it a difficult language to learn to read. Irish is also complex, however, the rules of spelling are more consistent in Irish than in English.

## **Children with Dyslexia in Irish-medium Schools**

An Irish-medium school (primary and post-primary, both within and outside the Gaeltacht) is a school in which all subjects, apart from English are taught through Irish and Irish is the language of communication in the school, both inside and outside the classroom and in the playground. This is known as ‘immersion education’ and helps children to become fluent in Irish naturally, while following the same curriculum as set down by the Department of Education and Skills.

Irish-medium and Gaeltacht schools are the choice of many parents of children with special educational needs and children with all levels of dyslexia are well represented in these school settings. Research confirms that dyslexia is the most frequently featured special educational need in an Irish-medium school. Irish-medium schools offer supports, teaching approaches, and strategies to help children with dyslexia manage their challenges and thrive in an Irish-medium school and beyond.

International research shows that there is no such thing as a foreign or second language learning disability. Children who have difficulties with written language will face those difficulties to a greater or lesser degree in all languages, depending on the complexity of the language and its orthography. Nonetheless, children with a range of special educational needs can successfully learn a second language. Evidence of this is the fact that while over 9% of children attending all-Irish primary schools have special education needs, most commonly dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism spectrum disorder, the clear majority successfully learn all curriculum subjects through Irish.



There are many misunderstandings about dyslexia and the suitability of learning Irish or learning through the medium of Irish. Being bilingual does not cause dyslexia or increase the risk for it. On the contrary, the benefits to the brain or cognitive benefits of bilingualism appear to support learning in the case of dyslexia.

For children for whom Irish is their main language, there are important social, emotional and educational benefits to continuing the use of Irish as the home language and language of schooling. Equally, there are many benefits in becoming bilingual for children for whom English is their only / main language.

Children whose home language is neither Irish or English also benefit from immersion education and it may help their fluency in English. Immersion education helps rather than hinders children in learning languages, including English.

The most important aspect for all students, especially those with special educational needs, is the quality of evidence-based instruction used to teach any language. Children with dyslexia in particular need to be taught using a phonics approach, in which the sounds of the language, as well as the letter-to-sound rules are taught.

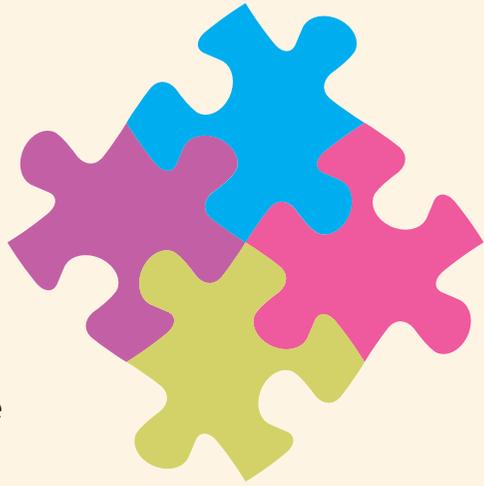
## School Supports

Since September 2017, students do not need to have a formal diagnosis of disability to avail of additional teaching supports in schools. Using the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Continuum of Support model, schools will identify students who require additional support and will assign suitable support to them. All children identified as having additional learning needs should receive additional teaching support.

All additional teaching support given to your child should build on and complement the support delivered by the class/subject teacher in the ordinary classroom situation. Effective additional teaching support can be provided to your child in a number of different ways including:

- ▶ Your child being part of a small group within the ordinary classroom
  - ▶ Your child being withdrawn as part of a small group to another classroom
  - ▶ Your child being taught on a one-to-one basis
  - ▶ Your child is taught as part of a class where team teaching is taking place
- Team teaching is where the special education teacher goes into a class with the class teacher and they share the planning and delivery of the class

Research shows that there is no one of the above models that suits all children with special educational needs for all of their school life. Most schools are flexible and may use all of the models described above, in different combinations. The school will take the particular needs of individual children into account when planning how best to provide support to them. Parents should also be consulted in the development of an Individual Education Plan (or Student Support Plan).



Some of the questions you might like to ask the principal / support staff include:-

- ▶ What model of support do you offer children with dyslexia?
- ▶ Does the school have much experience of supporting children with dyslexia?
- ▶ Does the school offer support in Irish?
- ▶ Does the school offer support in English?
- ▶ Is the school support team well resourced?
- ▶ Does the school staff engage in CPD (Continuing Professional Development) on dyslexia and other areas of SEN (Special Educational Needs)?
- ▶ Are there any elements of school life that will be more challenging for my child?
- ▶ What if my child fails to thrive?

- ▶ Does the school teach literacy (in all languages) using an evidence-based and dyslexia-friendly approach?
- ▶ Does the school offer support to parents on how to help and reinforce learning at home?
- ▶ Does the school provide access to assistive technology to support learning and aid access to the curriculum?

## Role of Parents

The National Council of Special Education (NCSE) offers advice to parents on their website on how best to help with homework.

See [www.sess.ie/dyslexia-section/helping-your-child-home](http://www.sess.ie/dyslexia-section/helping-your-child-home)

DAI offers courses, information events and conferences for parents and has a wide range of information available on its website

[www.dyslexia.ie](http://www.dyslexia.ie) or via email [info@dyslexia.ie](mailto:info@dyslexia.ie).

Irish-medium schools recognise the importance of engaging parents in all aspects of their child's learning, including homework. The majority of children in Irish-medium schools outside of Gaeltacht areas do not have Irish as one of their home languages. Teachers are aware of this and homework is designed to reinforce what the child has already covered during school hours.

Your child will be able to explain the homework they've been given in the language you speak together at home. It will help your child a lot if you show them that you're very interested in how they are becoming fluent in Irish, and in the progress they're making at school.

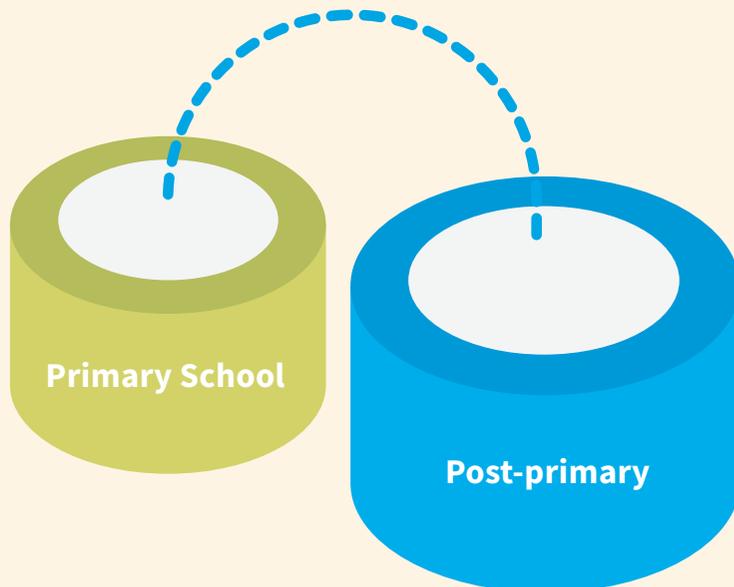
There are a number of resources now available to help parents support children in Irish-medium schools including phonetic versions of reading books and IT based learning programmes.

## Continuation from Primary to Post-Primary

Moving from primary school to post-primary can be a daunting time for all pupils and their parents. The post-primary school will provide initial support to all pupils in adjusting to life at post-primary, but it will also expect your child to show an increasing degree of independence and self-responsibility.

Discuss your child's needs with the school in advance and seek reassurance about how the school will support your child throughout their post-primary journey, including support while undertaking school and state examinations, and access to assistive technology.

Many pupils with dyslexia have successfully transitioned from primary to post-primary Irish-medium schools and gone on to perform to their full potential in Leaving Certificate examinations.



## Supports available

### Gaeloideachas

- ▶ FAQ section on SEN in Irish-medium schools on [www.gaeloideachas.ie](http://www.gaeloideachas.ie)
- ▶ Electronic Newsletter, published on a quarterly basis for parents of children in an Irish-medium school, featuring information on SEN
- ▶ Bi-annual seminars for parents of children with SEN
- ▶ Series of YouTube videos on different SEN questions  
See [www.gaeloideachas.ie](http://www.gaeloideachas.ie)
- ▶ Advice and support on all matters relating to education through the medium of Irish
- ▶ To enhance your Irish-language skills, visit [www.irishforparents.ie](http://www.irishforparents.ie)
- ▶ An Cumann Gael-litearthachta is an association which was established in collaboration with Gaeloideachas, offering information on literacy and dyslexia in the Irish language  
See [www.gael-lit.weebly.com](http://www.gael-lit.weebly.com) for more information

### DAI

- ▶ Website with a wide range of information on dyslexia  
[www.dyslexia.ie](http://www.dyslexia.ie)
- ▶ A dyslexia assessment service in its national office in Dublin
- ▶ Courses for parents, and information seminars (delivered in Dublin and regionally)
- ▶ Advice and support from the Information Helpline  
([info@dyslexia.ie](mailto:info@dyslexia.ie))
- ▶ Series of YouTube videos and Facebook live discussions on dyslexia
- ▶ Speakers are available for parent talks in schools and communities

## NCSE

- ▶ The National Council of Special Education offers advice to parents of children with dyslexia on home supports. See [www.sess.ie/dyslexia-section/language-and-literacy-helping-spoken-language-reading-spelling-and-writing](http://www.sess.ie/dyslexia-section/language-and-literacy-helping-spoken-language-reading-spelling-and-writing)



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[eolas@gaeloideachas.ie](mailto:eolas@gaeloideachas.ie)  
01 853 5195