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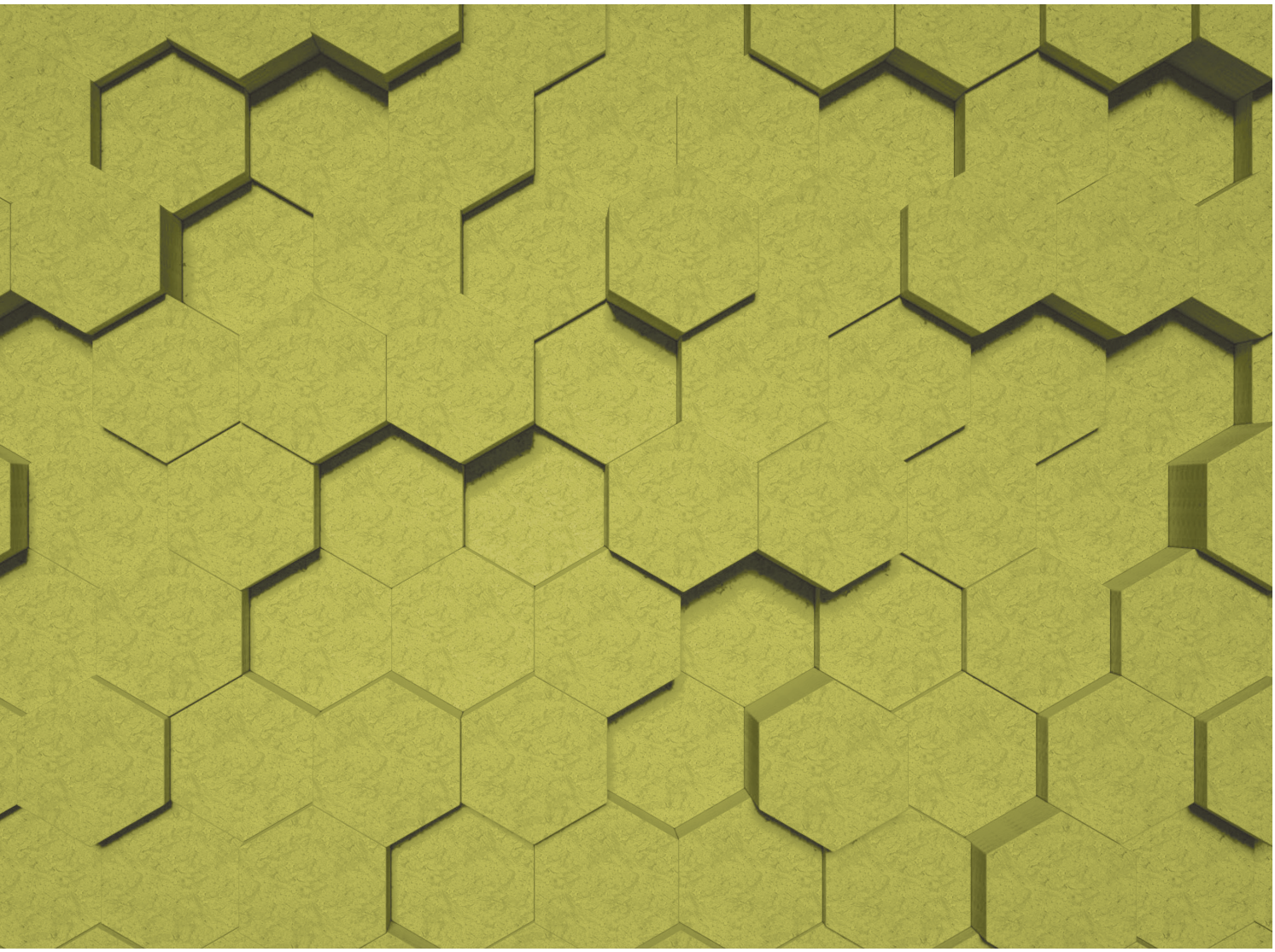
Specific learning difficulties framework



Guidance

Guidance document no: 175/2015
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Specific learning difficulties framework

Audience Mainstream schools and local authorities.

Overview This guidance provides information to help school leaders and practitioners to understand the difficulties that learners with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) face in order to make appropriate adjustments to teaching practice and school/classroom environments.

Action required Practioners should consider this advice as part of their classroom practice when supporting learners who have SpLD.

Further information

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Introduction

Specific learning difficulties (SpLD) affect the way information is learned and processed, which can have a significant impact on education and learning. They can occur across a range of intellectual abilities with learners varying in how their difficulties present. The term SpLD usually refers to:

- dyslexia
- dyscalculia
- developmental coordination disorder (DCD) (sometimes know as dyspraxia)
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Specific language impairment (SLI).

See Appendix for descriptions of the above.

Someone with one type of SpLD will often have a co-occurring difficulty and present with another type of SpLD.

To ensure schools are well placed to support the varying needs of learners with a SpLD, the Welsh Government has developed this SpLD Framework.

Why is a SpLD Framework important?

Supporting learners with a SpLD is a matter for all schools. While there is some guidance and/or training available on how to support learners with a SpLD, there is a lack of clarity with regards to definitions and what is meant by terminology such as screening, assessment and interventions.

The lack of consistent information has in part led to a variation in how local authorities (LAs) and their schools routinely identify, assess and make provision for children with SpLD. Previous research commissioned by the Welsh Government into dyslexia provision throughout schools in Wales[1] highlights this variation across LAs.

There is therefore a need to provide schools with a simple but effective way of signposting to relevant information and important guidance that can be used to help support school practitioners to deliver appropriate educational provision for children with SpLD. In doing so, this will help to apply a more consistent approach to educational support throughout Wales.

[1] www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/research-dyslexia-provision/?lang=en

Implementing the SpLD Framework appropriately as part of a school's wider approach to special educational needs (SEN) provision, will allow schools to become more inclusive and help meet the needs of this group of vulnerable learners. The SpLD Framework would:

- be for individuals and for those who are supporting them
- provide a consistent approach to SpLD across Wales
- ensure that links are made with Welsh Government policies across the departments
- support early identification of SpLD and early interventions at primary level
- assess existing and/or develop new resources for SpLD in English and Welsh as required.

Purpose, aims and features of the SpLD Framework

The SpLD Framework has been developed with experts in the field of SpLD[2] who brought knowledge and best practice from universities, LAs, local health boards and the third sector. Its purpose is to deliver a more inclusive education system for children with SpLD and help school leaders and practitioners to understand the difficulties that learners face in order to make appropriate adjustments to teaching practice and school/classroom environments.

The key aims of the SpLD Framework are to:

- improve the understanding of SpLD and highlight SpLD-friendly practice
- raise awareness of strategies to support school-aged children with SpLD
- encourage use of guidance and information available to schools aimed at helping support learners with a SpLD.

The key features of the SpLD Framework include:

- 16 expectation statements that provide the key characteristics of a SpLD-friendly school
- expectation statements that give a notional process for the creation of SpLD-friendly environments. The process involves:

– – **schools** ensuring that their policies support learners with a SpLD

– – **learners** becoming more involved with their learning

– – **practitioners** identifying, supporting and implementing targeted interventions for learners 'at risk' of falling behind their peers.

How to use the SpLD Framework

The 16 expectation statements can be found in the following table. Further detail on each expectation statement is provided in the subsequent sections.

Supporting guidance materials and information relating to the SpLD Framework are available via Learning Wales at learning.gov.wales/resources/collections/spld-framework/?lang=en. Schools and practitioners should ensure they consider their own teaching practice in relation to SpLD by regularly refreshing their knowledge of SpLD approaches.

[2] learning.gov.wales/news/events/spld-task-finish-group/?lang=en

The SpLD Framework

Expectation statements for SpLD-friendly schools				
Schools should ensure that their policies support learners with a SpLD by →	clarifying how learners with a SpLD will be identified, supported and monitored	implementing appropriate professional learning for all practitioners including support staff	ensuring the adoption of appropriate teaching and learning strategies	making them clear and accessible to parents/carers and outside agencies
Learners should be more involved with their learning by →	participating in the development of their learning plan	accessing support in English/Welsh	adopting approaches that support learning and responsibility for own learning	receiving support to build up their resilience/self-esteem in order to achieve their potential
Practitioners should identify, support and implement targeted interventions for learners 'at risk' of falling behind their peers by →	focusing on early identification of learners by using appropriate screening tools	ensuring that appropriate differentiation, resources and equipment are utilised	providing pedagogical approaches that benefit all learners	identifying targeted support as required
	identifying and utilising effective assessment tools	identifying and utilising appropriate targeted interventions	monitoring the impact of interventions against learner progress	referring learners to external specialists as appropriate

Each section of the SpLD Framework can be found on the following table and provides information relating to each of its expectation statements.

Explanation of each expectation statement

Learners and school practitioners should view supporting documentation on Learning Wales in relation to each of the expectation statements.

Schools should ensure that their policies support learners with a SpLD by:	
clarifying how learners with a SpLD will be identified, supported and monitored.	**Explanation** In considering policies to support those with a SpLD, schools should ensure that important information is provided about how staff can identify those who may be demonstrating SpLDs. Local policies should signpost to sources of information that can be used to support the learner's needs. They should also provide information about the school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and other key staff that can help deliver support to those with a SpLD. Schools, in developing their policies such as assessment and curriculum, should include how they will monitor and evaluate all learners' progress, including SpLDs.
implementing appropriate professional learning for all practitioners including support staff.	**Explanation** From September 2015, all schools are required to have a three-year school development plan (SDP) in place. The SDP is the school's strategic improvement plan and must include a staff development plan that sets out how the school intends to develop and deploy the workforce to meet its priorities and targets. Schools should use the performance management process to ensure that professional development needs are identified through self-evaluation and with reference to the school's priorities and targets, as well as the relevant professional standards. Those staff working directly with learners with a SpLD should be appropriately trained to be able to identify signs of SpLD and be able to put in place the appropriate interventions at a school level. Schools should ensure that practitioners have access to appropriate resources when undertaking professional learning that relates to SpLD. They should look to encourage the professional learning of all practitioners and support them in any training arrangements required, in line with the Welsh Government's professional learning model which has been developed as part of the New Deal for the Education Workforce.

ensuring the adoption of appropriate teaching and learning strategies.	**Explanation** As with all SEN, schools should ensure appropriate learning strategies are in place to help learners with a SpLD to fully engage in classroom activities. Adopting appropriate teaching strategies will help create a comfortable environment for all learners with a varying range of learning needs. School policy should identify the basic principles of effective teaching practice when engaging with learners who have SEN. The principles should be flexible enough to ensure learning strategies can be applied to meet the range of learning needs, including those identified as having SpLD. Person-centred practice helps to identify both the barriers to learning that a learner experiences and ways of working that will achieve positive outcomes. Using person-centred tools helps practitioners identify appropriate learning and teaching strategies. Under the New Deal for the Education Workforce, access to high-quality professional learning is an entitlement for all practitioners so that they are able to continuously improve and develop their pedagogical skills.
making them clear and accessible to parents/carers and outside agencies.	**Explanation** Schools should ensure their policies, e.g. strategic equality plans, are available to parents/carers and outside agencies. Policies for SEN, including SpLD, should clearly explain the school's approach to making the curriculum accessible to this group of learners. These policies should highlight where support can be accessed within the school and provide relevant contact information for anyone reading them. Parents/carers, families and the home learning environment are critical to children's learning and educational attainment. The Welsh Government has produced detailed 'Family and community engagement guidance' for schools together with a toolkit of resources, published on the Learning Wales website.

Learners should be more involved with their learning by:	
participating in the development of their learning plan.	**Explanation** Learners should be at the heart of the planning of their educational provision to ensure any tailored interventions are appropriate to their needs. All practitioners are encouraged to use approaches based on person-centred practice when planning and agreeing provision for a learner with a SpLD (and other learners with SEN). This requires the involvement of the learner and parents/carers at all stages and a number of tools are available to help practitioners, learners and their families to understand and make the most of this approach. Person-centred practice should be used to develop and complete any plans designed to make the necessary educational provision. Further information on person-centred practice will be available on Learning Wales.
accessing support in English/Welsh.	**Explanation** Learners with a SpLD and other SEN should receive support where appropriate and reasonably practical in their preferred language, whether through English, Welsh or both. It is important that the support of relevant personnel who can work with all learners through the medium of Welsh is readily available.
adopting approaches that support learning and responsibility for own learning.	**Explanation** Learners with a SpLD should be encouraged to take control of their own learning where appropriate. Person-centred practice helps to give the learner a central role in identifying appropriate learning activities and the support they need to achieve positive outcomes. School practitioners play a key role in promoting independent learning as well as delivering interventions to support their needs. Having a good understanding of learners' abilities will help to determine the approach practitioners may wish to take to ensure learners with a SpLD have the confidence to take responsibility for their own learning. Any approaches should be monitored regularly and evaluated to ensure the desired outcomes are being fulfilled.

receiving support to build up their resilience/self-esteem in order to achieve their potential.	**Explanation** Learners with a SpLD should receive additional support from practitioners and other staff working with them to help improve their self-esteem and confidence. It is important when doing so that practitioners have an understanding of vulnerabilities learners with a SpLD may have generally, but more importantly, that they have an understanding of the individual's specific needs. Encouraging engagement and responsibility of learning will often help build the learner's confidence and therefore help them to reach their full potential.

Practitioners should identify, support and implement targeted interventions for learners 'at risk' of falling behind their peers by:	
focusing on early identification of learners by using appropriate screening tools.	**Explanation** The importance of early identification for any child who may have SEN cannot be over-emphasised. The earlier action is taken, the more responsive the child is likely to be, and more promptly intervention can be made. A learner at risk of falling behind will inevitably show signs that they are having difficulty with certain aspects of learning. This can be evidenced through their engagement, or lack of, and written work that they produce. Practitioners are best placed to identify these signs. As with all areas of SEN, early identification of SpLD and subsequent intervention will impact greatly on a learner's attainment. Practitioners should therefore have an understanding of appropriate screening tools that can be used and be able to identify signs of SpLD from analysis of any screening applied. Guidance on screening, assessment and intervention methods for learners in Wales with SpLD can be found on Learning Wales.
ensuring that appropriate differentiation, resources and equipment are utilised.	**Explanation** School practitioners should be mindful of the resources and equipment that are available to both identify and support learners who may experience difficulties associated with SpLDs. Practitioners should ensure differentiation in their teaching practice, through teacher questioning and differentiated activities, to meet the needs of all learners. This approach is particularly

	important for a learner with a SpLD. Assistive technologies can be particularly useful for unlocking the potential of those with a SpLD. Guidance for teachers on assistive technologies for learners with a SpLD is available on Learning Wales.
providing pedagogical approaches that benefit all learners.	**Explanation** It is important that practitioners adopt pedagogical approaches when teaching all learners but particularly with those who may have a SpLD. When applying these approaches, practitioners should be able to identify signs that a learner is struggling with a particular concept of learning and therefore at risk of falling behind. By distinguishing these learners from their peers, practitioners should be able to provide appropriate support and interventions while continuing to apply the principles of pedagogy. Problem-solving methods can help to identify a learner at risk of falling behind but for another learner it can be an alternative approach to suit their ability to learn. Practitioners should keep in mind section '2.2 Teaching' of each of Estyn's *Guidance for the inspection of primary schools* and *Guidance for the inspection of secondary schools* (both Estyn, 2014). Person-centred practice helps to identify both the barriers to learning a learner experiences and their preferred ways of working. Using person-centred tools gives learners a voice and helps practitioners to understand what pedagogical approaches would be most effective.
identify targeted support as required.	**Explanation** The assessment of a learner and the monitoring of a learner's progress is important for all learners' development. This is particularly important for those at risk of falling behind their peers because of a SpLD that has gone unidentified or when intervention that has been put in place is not, or no longer, appropriate for their learning needs. Practitioners should ensure good-quality monitoring of learner progress is embedded into their teaching practice. As well as measuring against any objectives set for the learner, practitioners should monitor a learner's well-being and academic progress on a daily basis and be confident to review the support in place at any given time.

	Clear intended outcomes should be identified for all interventions. These can be developed through person-centred discussions with the learner, their parents/carers and the practitioners involved in supporting them. All outcomes should encourage and support the learner's aspirations. Actual outcomes could be rated against a range of intended outcomes, e.g. using a RAG system (red = not met, orange = met, green = exceeded), pupil self-evaluation, test results, qualitative and quantitative data, etc.
identifying and utilising effective assessment tools.	**Explanation** Ensuring appropriate intervention to support a learner with a SpLD will impact greatly on their ability to learn. It will help instill confidence in the learner's approach to learning and unlock their potential. Following screening of a learner's needs, practitioners should understand how to identify effective assessment tools (when appropriate to do so) that can be used to inform targeted interventions for the learner or when to make an appropriate referral to a specialist for an assessment. This in turn will lead to the identification of appropriate targeted interventions (see following expectation statement).
identifying and utilising appropriate targeted interventions.	**Explanation** Ensuring appropriate intervention to support a learner with a SpLD will impact greatly on their ability to learn and subsequently their attainment. The Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF) contains material that can assist with charting children's progress, especially using the Foundation Phase Profile (FPP) which aims to assess children's abilities and development in a number of areas of learning. Following an analysis of information obtained by an assessment, practitioners should be able to identify and implement appropriate interventions that will support the learner to access the curriculum and to help them reach their full potential. Person-centred practice helps to identify both the barriers a learner experiences to learning and their preferred ways of working. Using person-centred tools gives learners a voice in planning their support and helps practitioners to identify appropriate targeted interventions.

monitoring the impact of interventions against learner progress	**Explanation** The monitoring of all learners is essential to providing a tailored approach to teaching a classroom of individuals. This is particularly important where a learner has shown signs that they are falling behind their peers and/or has a history of requiring additional support to meet their learning needs. It is important that practitioners continually monitor the progress of learners identified as having a SpLD to ensure that the interventions that are in place are still appropriate to each learner's needs. The use of quality assurance methods/tools should be used. While this can be done at key points during the school term, practitioners should be observant of the learner's progress on a daily basis. Practitioners should also regularly consult with teaching assistants where appropriate. Monitoring of the impact of interventions and the learner's progress should be integrated into the school's management information system (MIS) rather than recorded separately. By including this information within the school's MIS it is possible to combine a wide range of data and therefore gain a richer picture of a learner's development.
referring learners to external specialists as appropriate.	**Explanation** Schools should be equipped to implement interventions aimed at supporting the majority of learners who are struggling with particular aspects of their learning. This is done in liaison with the school SENCo and other staff where appropriate. However, on occasions the school may not have the expertise in-house to carry out specific assessments and interventions appropriate to addressing all learners' needs. In such circumstances, practitioners should contact their LA education service for advice on external specialists, such as NHS services, third sector providers or even other local schools with skilled staff, who can provide specialised targeted assessment and support to learners with a SpLD.

Appendix: Descriptions of SpLD

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	
What is it?	ADHD is the umbrella term to describe a condition that affects individuals' attention, concentration, impulsivity, activity levels and memory (ADD is included in this).
How common is it?	One learner in every two classes may have severe ADHD.
What are the characteristic features?	Learners may present difficulties with attention and concentration, and may also have symptoms of 'hyperactivity', which becomes less obvious as they grow older. Examples of difficulties may be in queuing and waiting their turn.

Developmental coordination disorder (DCD)	
What is it?	Developmental coordination disorder (DCD), also known as dyspraxia in the UK, affects fine motor and gross motor coordination and balance skills.
How common is it?	One to two learners in every class.
What are the characteristic features?	Learners may present with difficulties with self-care, writing, typing, riding a bike and play, as well as other educational and recreational activities. It may affect the learner participating and functioning fully in everyday life skills in education and at home which require coordination.

Dyscalculia	
What is it?	Dyscalculia is a condition that primarily affects the ability to acquire arithmetical skills.
How common is it?	Two learners in every class.
What are the characteristic features?	Learners may have difficulty understanding simple number concepts, lack an intuitive grasp of numbers, and have problems learning number facts, times tables and procedures. Even if they produce a correct answer or use a correct method, they may do so mechanically and without confidence.

Dyslexia	
What is it?	Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.
How common is it?	One to two learners in every class.
What are the characteristic features?	Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.

Speech, language and communication difficulties	
What is it?	Specific language impairment (SLI) is a developmental disorder that may affect the learner's ability to speak, understand, and communicate effectively.
How common is it?	One learner in every class.
What are the characteristic features?	Learners may have a speech disorder which means they may present varying difficulties in producing speech sounds or problems with voice quality. Learners may also have a language disorder which means they may have difficulties in the ability to understand (receptive language) and/or use words or express thoughts (expressive language). Sometimes a learner will have both language and speech delays.