



Briefing Note: Dyslexia Screening Tools

To:	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
Cc:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Date:	21 December 2020	Priority:	Medium
Security Level:	In Confidence	METIS No:	1246502
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Messaging seen by Communications team:	No	Round Robin:	No

Purpose of Report

This report updates you on the Ministry's work to date on the development of a dyslexia screening tool as part of Priority 2 of the Learning Support Action Plan: *Screening and early identification of learning support needs*.

Summary

- The Ministry is investigating the development of tools identified in Priority 2 of the Government's plan to strengthen learning support: the *Learning Support Action Plan* (LSAP). In particular, it is responding to recommendations on strengthening screening and the early identification of learning support needs through development of assessment tools at school entry and screening for dyslexia and dyspraxia.
- The dyslexia and dyspraxia works sit alongside the development of the School Entry kete of tools that support teachers and kaiako to notice, recognise and respond to individual strengths and needs of ākonga at school entry described in the associated briefing [METIS 1246501 refers].
- The Ministry has delivered the *New Zealand Dyslexia Handbook* and distributed it to every school to support teachers in assessing and teaching of students with dyslexia and dyslexic-type traits, as well as a range of online supports and guidance.
- We have prioritized building teachers' understanding of dyslexia – equipping them to use existing assessments to identify dyslexic type traits and respond to the range of needs that can be attributed to dyslexia through a range of resources and teaching strategies – rather than developing of a screening tool that would obtain a single 'diagnosis'.



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21/12/2020

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Background

1. In 2016, there was a Select Committee Inquiry into Identification and Support for Children and Young People with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Autism Spectrum Disorders in Primary and Secondary Schools. The inquiry found an inconsistent and variable approach in the way schools identified and responded to students with learning support needs. Many parents, whānau and young people shared their, often traumatic, experiences of struggling to learn and make progress within the schooling system.
2. The Select Committee report highlighted the importance of raising teachers' capability and identifying learning support needs earlier. It also called for an improved range of supports and services for children and young people with neurodiverse needs who may be at risk of disengaging from education.
3. There are six strategic priorities within the *Learning Support Action Plan* (LSAP) that are being implemented over the next few years to strengthen learning support. They are:
 - i. introducing Learning Support Coordinators in schools and kura;
 - ii. screening to enable teachers and other educators to identify and respond to children's learning support needs earlier;
 - iii. strengthening early intervention;
 - iv. providing additional, more flexible supports for neurodiverse children and young people;
 - v. increasing access to supports for gifted children and young people; and
 - vi. improving education for children and young people at risk of disengaging from education.
4. Funding for Priority 2 of LSAP was appropriated in July 2020 [refer CAB-19-MIN-0174.13 Initiative No. 10886].
5. In relation to dyslexia screening, LSAP priority two (screening and early identification of learning support needs) commits us to “**develop evidence-based screening tools reflecting Māori concepts and focused on learning needs (rather than diagnosis)**”:
 - i. Screening for dyslexia, dyspraxia and giftedness: Identify existing tools to help with the identification of dyslexia and make available to coincide with the roll-out of first tranche of Learning Support Coordinators between July 2019 – December 2020.
 - ii. Staged roll-out across all schools and kura (subject to funding) from 2021.¹
6. Identification of existing tools to help with the identification of dyslexia (refer 4.i. above) has been achieved. The existing tools have been identified and made available to all schools, including those with Learning Support Coordinators (refer to the dyslexia kete

¹ Learning Support Action Plan 2019-2025, p. 29.

in paragraphs 15 - 17). We have not yet undertaken any work on identifying existing screening tools for dyspraxia and giftedness as this work is subject to available funding.

Progress to date

7. Work on the dyslexia tools began with identifying national and international research and practice in dyslexia at the end of 2019 (refer Annex 1).
8. Our key findings were that defining dyslexia is a complex and contested process, and that there is no single agreed remedial intervention or specific approach or programme to address dyslexia. As every ākonga with dyslexia and dyslexic-type traits will have a unique range of abilities, we recommend that teachers and educational practitioners be resourced with a variety of different strategies.
9. The dominant cognitive explanation for dyslexia is the 'phonological deficit hypothesis', which is defined as a difficulty in connecting the sounds of language to letters because of a structural deficit in that part of the brain associated with processing the sounds of language. However, there are many other ākonga in our learning system who may have difficulty in early phonological processing and phonemic awareness due to other factors.

Co-design Process

10. With a co-codesign group of teachers and principals, we identified the importance of multi-pronged approach. This would be made up of three aspects:
 - i. Early Identification: The School Entry kete enables teachers to identify ākonga who are experiencing difficulty in establishing strong foundational literacy skills;
 - ii. Dyslexia kete: including a copy of the *New Zealand Dyslexia Handbook*, which provides a guide to understanding dyslexia in children and youth, with strategies for assessing and teaching reading and spelling, and a range of additional resources; and
 - iii. Investigation of existing or potential additional specific screening tools.

Early Identification

11. Early identification will be supported by the **School Entry Kete**. We are currently co-designing with teachers and principals tools that focus on the following areas: Initial Phoneme Identity; Letter-Sound recognition; Phoneme Blending; Phoneme Segmentation; Non-word Reading, and Story Retell, as part of the School Entry kete described in the associated briefing [METIS 1246501 refers].
12. The majority of the students identified as requiring specific support are unlikely to be dyslexic and will receive universal approaches to teaching that are inclusive of all learners, alongside more targeted, personalised teaching in the regular classroom². For

² This is described as 'tier one' and 'tier two' in the Response to Intervention model.

example, 'first effective' teaching through supporting and monitoring ākonga development of phonological awareness in early learning and primary settings.

13. Advice from the Director of the University of Canterbury's Child Well-Being Research Institute, Professor Gail Gillon, is that ākonga who are not secure in their phonological knowledge after two consecutive terms of this more systematic approach are likely to require further assessment for the presence of dyslexia or other conditions and require more individualised support.
14. In 2021, the Ministry will provide schools with the opportunity to participate in Better Start Literacy Approach | Te Ara Reo Matatini (BSLA),³ which places greater emphasis on developing phonic and phonological awareness for ākonga in their first year of school. In addition, the Ministry has developed Ready to Read Phonics Plus – an enhanced Ready to Read instructional series, which has new texts focused on a systematic approach to teaching reading. These texts will be available to schools in 2021 through.
15. Changes to Reading Recovery provision in schools will also support greater emphasis on developing phonic and phonological awareness. Reading Recovery will incorporate the Ready to Read Phonics Plus texts and enable Reading Recovery teachers to work with small groups of children needing literacy support, as well as those requiring 1:1 tuition. Reading Recovery teachers and tutors will also receive guidance on how they can contribute to cross-school literacy strategies, so that more ākonga benefit from their knowledge and expertise.

Dyslexia kete:

16. The first tranche of Learning Support Coordinators (LSCs) began their work in schools in 2020. These are full time roles which are fully focused on identifying and understanding need, supporting kaiako/teachers in schools and kura to lift their capability to better meet the needs of learners, and coordinating provision of support across a cluster.
17. To support the LSC role and to build awareness and understanding of dyslexia across all schools, a kete of resources was launched that provided schools with resources to support ākonga exhibiting dyslexic-type traits. The dyslexia kete of resources provided to schools, Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour and Resource Teachers: Literacy earlier this year includes:
 - An updated teaching resource, *About Dyslexia*, to support the literacy learning of students with dyslexia in English-medium settings;
 - *Tīpaopao*, a Māori-medium introductory resource for supporting ākonga with dyslexia;
 - Two videos to support literacy instruction in Māori-medium kura;
 - The *New Zealand Dyslexia Handbook* written by New Zealand dyslexia experts Tom Nicholson and Susan Dymock for the purpose of improving literacy outcomes for students with dyslexia; and

³ Delivered in collaboration with the University of Canterbury: <https://www.betterstartapproach.com/>

- A refreshed *Dyslexia and Learning* guide accessible on the Ministry's Inclusive Education website. The refreshed guide has been expanded to include strategies and tips in understanding dyslexia and literacy acquisition, structured literacy, and developing schoolwide approaches.
18. A selection of non-Ministry of Education resources that either support students with dyslexia or have a New Zealand phonics focus is available to teachers via Te Kete Ipurangi (refer <https://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/>).

Additional specific screening tool

19. Our approach to investigating the development of a specific screening tool for dyslexia began with a review and identification of existing screening tools at the end of 2019. The recommendation of this work was to focus initial efforts on the *New Zealand Dyslexia Handbook* as this included not only assessment tools but placed them within a broader setting of teaching strategies. We are currently investigating the development of some screening tools that might be of use for older learners.
20. The Ministry's response to ākonga who are exhibiting dyslexic-type traits has been to invest in first effective practice in the systematic teaching of phonological and phonemic awareness in the early primary years. It is recognised that there will be a small number of ākonga who continue to require additional support and we have an increased focus on professional development support for specialist staff on dyslexia, alongside the provision of a range of resource materials for classroom teachers, specialist teachers and parents and whānau.
21. There will be a number of older ākonga who continue to have gaps in foundational literacy skills and who will continue to require additional support. The nature and resourcing for this needs to be determined.
22. Ākonga often require extra time to process learning, ask questions, and complete assessments. They often require reader/writer support and assistive technologies, such as laptops and software, as well as reader/writer support during assessments.
23. Teaching approaches that reduce the writing requirements and reliance on text, and a greater use of visual and pictorial aids in learning, and to demonstrate knowledge, can be beneficial.
24. A dyslexia screening tool at particular transition stages (e.g. year levels 3, 6, 8 and 10) maybe useful to confirm dyslexia, and the Ministry has examined several tools that might be of use for older learners. Currently, our emphasis remains on responding to the range of needs that can be attributed to dyslexia through developing and supporting strategies, capability building and resources, rather than developing a 'single-diagnosis' screening tool.
25. Any existing tools developed in other jurisdictions would need to be adapted for the New Zealand context, be culturally responsive and incorporate Māori concepts such as tino rangatiratanga, whānau, mana tikanga and mana tangata.

Key Risks and Benefits

26. The following table shows risks that have been identified in the dyslexia project which are currently subject to mitigation processes:

Risks	Mitigations
1. Solutions may be perceived as overly focussed on specific needs and perpetuate deficit-theorising, rather than a holistic strengths-based orientation towards ākonga and their whānau.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">i. This is being managed through the co-design process undertaken with the schools' reference group who attend a hui every term. This is made up of teachers and principals who represent the demographic of New Zealand schools and ākonga.ii. Working closely with participants is ensuring that prototype development reinforces the importance of a rich ākonga profile that captures whānau aspirations, strengths, and areas requiring additional support or further investigation.
2. As part of the current funding for the School Entry kete, there is some funding for the design and development of the dyslexia screening tool. However, there is no funding for the implementation phase which is a risk to the current project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">i. Feedback received from sector representatives has highlighted the importance of a well-supported implementation strategy including targeted professional development. This would ensure the effective and considered use and application of the tools, and the use of the information to positively impact ākonga and their teachers.

Next Steps

27. The following aspects of the project will be progressed in 2021:
- i. The Ministry will align this work to the wider curriculum refresh work programme which seeks to develop a clear progression framework [Education Report Metis 124677].
 - ii. We are keen to discuss with you the value in developing dyslexia screening tools at this stage, either in addition to or instead of our current capability-building emphasis.
 - iii. We will continue to liaise with teacher and principal unions to represent the views of their members and as key stakeholders. As with the School Entry kete project, we welcome their participation in meetings and hui to ensure we are responsive to any issues and concerns.

- iv. We will be engaging with a range of stakeholders to identify who else will need to be involved in the co-design process. The current schools' reference group is largely focussed on early primary so it will be essential to include teachers of ākonga in middle and senior primary, and secondary schools for this work.

Proactive Release

- 28. We recommend that this Briefing Note is not released at this time because the tools are still under development.

Annexes

Annex 1: Dyslexia Screening Tools Development

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	2019		2000			2021			2022 -	
	→ July	Dec	Mar	July	Dec	Mar	July	Dec	Mar	July →
Review of research on dyslexia and dyslexic type-traits.										
Identification of existing screening tools.										
Alignment of project to <i>Response to Intervention (RTI)</i> placing emphasis on Tier 1 and 2 in class support.	School Entry Assessment (SEA) Kete Project commenced.									
			Distribution of NZ Dyslexia Handbook to all schools. Updated Literacy Online with strategies and resources to support ākonga with dyslexic-type traits English & Māori Medium.	Dyslexia and Learning Updated Guide on Inclusive Education Website July 27.						
Sector consultation and co design on dyslexia-screening tools for older ākonga.										