



INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)/SCHOOL DISCUSSION

What is an IEP plan?

An Individualised Education Plan is also known as an IEP. This is a plan developed to ensure that a child with an identified disability who is attending an educational institution receives specialised instruction and related services.

We suggest that if you can, aim for 3 IEPs a year. They are a great way to get everyone involved in your child's education working on the same page. You can share successes, review goals and set new goals. Two/three goals per IEP is generally enough for a few months.

Who can attend an IEP meeting?

Parents, teachers, RTLB/RTLiT, tutors, therapists, whoever is involved in your child's learning.

Background Knowledge

Teachers will only know what he/she knows. Unless they have received training on how the dyslexic brain learns to read, the odds are, all they know is Balanced Literacy supplemented with the school phonics programme. Please try and remember, it's only in the last 10 months we have started to see the Ministry of Education recognise Structured Literacy as best practice for dyslexics. This has not been rolled out to teacher training organisations or as wide-spread professional development for practising teachers. Teachers were, and still are, being taught Balanced Literacy. This is why we say it is important to educate ourselves as parents – then we can support our teachers and work together to get the best outcome for our child's learning.

We acknowledge many teachers and schools are now making the move towards a Structured Literacy approach which works for all kids. We also want to acknowledge that from 2022 there are now facilitators and professional development on Structured literacy on the list provided by the Ministry of Education (MoE). This means all schools and teachers can now access Structured Literacy professional training using funding provided by the MoE.

We would also like to acknowledge many teachers don't have a lot of time to do the research and will do what they know or what a colleague has referred them to. We have found if you lighten the load and make it easy for them to implement a different approach they usually come on board. We have also found most schools can't afford the resources so where possible try and supply them if your budget allows.

We have found the best way to approach an IEP meeting or discussion is to have a good idea of what your child needs to succeed. Find out where they need help before you go if you can. Make sure you read through all the notes on the assessments that have been done and ask for a copy of any tests or assessments that have been completed in class.

When asking for the meeting please be mindful that the first 2-3 weeks of term one is very busy with assessments. We would also recommend emailing the teachers, if possible, a week before the meeting outlining what you would like to discuss and include any information that is relevant including this link. It is important to give them the time to digest this knowledge, for many it will be the first time seeing it. This can hopefully help with decisions being made for your child on the day of the meeting rather than waiting for another meeting.

Your goal is to get as much support as your child needs and, where possible, implement some Structured Literacy in his/her day.

Phonological Awareness

Has your child been assessed for their phonological awareness and has anyone assessed their symbol to grapheme (hear the sound and write it) and grapheme to symbol (see the sound and say it) knowledge? You may be surprised with the results as most schools don't assess sound to symbol awareness. If your child hasn't been assessed you can find a free assessment in our **Free Assessments** that you can complete yourself or provide the school.

Does the school teach phonological awareness, especially phonemic awareness? If yes, can this be provided for homework? If they don't, this could be a way to introduce some resources and information on it. Recommended resources would be the Heggerty books or David Kilpatrick's book. You can find free phonological awareness assessments under [Free Assessments](#).

[What is phonological Awareness and how does it work](#)

Reading

If the school is using a Balanced Literacy approach, they will be using guided reading books, PM readers or Ready to Read guided books. This approach is designed around memorising and skipping words and looking at the picture for meaning using predictable texts. These strategies are detrimental to your child's learning, and we recommend the school stops using them. For more details on Balanced Literacy please read '[Why can't my child read?](#)'

We recommend **decodable books** (as does the Ministry of Education) if the child does not have enough knowledge of the alphabetical code. If the school does not have their own decodable books, then, if possible, try and supply decodable books and workbooks and any other resources that would help. Ask if the books can be used for reading and writing. Some examples of this are UK Phonics Decodable books with workbooks and High Noon decodable books and workbooks. Refer to our [Resource Hub](#) for "[What we do recommend](#)"

We recommend you watch Dr. Maria S Murray from The Reading League: **Reading is Not a Visual Task** webinar https://youtu.be/4HeE1y9TIAM?si=NnZRKYReU1mZ_0Bk

and **Orthographic Mapping: What it Is and Why It's So Important**https://youtu.be/XfRHcUeGohc?si=sLEAdvbygf9Rj_OJ

Please also listen to these podcasts by Emily Hanford:

- **Hard Words** – [Why aren't kids being taught to read?](#)
- **At a loss for words** – [What is wrong with how schools teach?](#)

Spelling Words

If the school is teaching Balanced Literacy, then you need to address how they teach spelling. Memorising words will not work for a dyslexic child. Refer to Dr. Maria S Murray Video above for more information on memorising.

If your child goes to an educator or tutor and they are teaching your child to use the alphabetical code with a systematic approach, then ask them to give you or your child's teacher the spelling words each week that match the pattern/rule they are working on. If he/she is still learning CVC words, then his/her spelling words should be CVC words (not words from essential lists that don't follow any pattern) and the spelling words should correlate to the part of the scope and sequence the child is currently learning from.

If you are doing the teaching at home using a Structured Literacy approach, then ask if the school would be happy for you to provide spelling words. Also refer to the sight word paragraph below.

Sight words/High Frequency Words/Irregular words

Irregular words (words that don't follow phonology) should be introduced at a rate of maybe one or two a week. Adjust if the child is coping using orthographic mapping as much as possible.

Five from Five have an excellent article on sight words. [What are sight words?](#)

Map it resource can be found here and also refer to the irregular word section on [‘What does Structured Literacy lesson look like in intervention?’](#)

Writing

If your child needs help with writing (which many do because they usually haven't had enough practice), ask who can support this in class. The teacher, or maybe the school, might have a teacher aide. Think about what supports would be beneficial. These could include a pencil grip, letter formation chart to practice writing the letter formations, dirt/grass/sky paper to support size and starting position.

Would providing dictation sentences from decodable books or workbooks that you use at home help? There is also some benefit in copy work to help practice letter formations and size and build the muscles in the hands. Copy work is not recommended for learning, only practice, and build it up a few sentences at a time.

For older students ask about Reader Writers. If recommended can a laptop, iPad or Notebook be used?

Something to consider – can your child generate their own stories when telling the story, but limits what he/she writes on paper? Technology may be a great support in this situation. If your child can't generate their own stories, you may need to dig deeper and see if there is a language issue, because you can't write anything if you can't generate it.

We would also consider if the child needs help with the sequence of a story. There are lots of supports for helping with structuring a story. Mind mapping is one that comes to mind and most schools have a "Who, Where, When, What" sheet that can be used. For kids who need scaffolding and for kids who need even more, you can start with pictures to help them generate their stories. We have a listed a few under our **Free Resources**.

Fluency

Fluency is defined as **the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression**. In order to understand what they read, children must be able to read fluently whether they are reading aloud or silently. When reading aloud, fluent readers read in phrases and add intonation appropriately.

Ask questions around how this is assessed in the class. We know dyslexic kids are slower and need more time and when teachers use a timer it can shut them down before they have even started. Have a discussion around what the purpose of timing is, and does that work for your child or does it cause more anxiety around reading.

Vocabulary

Ask questions around how this is being taught and what resources they are using. Vocabulary is so important in helping with comprehension and keeping your child learning with their peers. We have to be on the lookout for 'The Matthew Effect' in reading.

What is the Matthew effect in reading?

In the educational community, the "Matthew Effect" refers to the idea that, in reading (as in other areas of life), the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. When children fail at early reading and writing, they begin to dislike reading. They read less than their classmates who are stronger readers.

Check our vocabulary resources under **Resource Hub** and **What is Background Knowledge and Vocabulary?** under our [Learning Hub](#)

Comprehension

We would ask questions around if your child is comprehending the text being read in the class, how are they assessing this? Many kids just sit and nod but have no idea what the story is about. It is important to find out if your child is being asked literal questions (who/what/where) and inferential (why and how) questions to assess their comprehension. This is something you can also help with, as teachers can have anything from 20-45 kids in the class and sometimes more. Ask the teacher what texts she plans to use, and you can read them to your child and talk about words and phrases they don't understand. Fiction can trip kids up just as much as non-fiction especially if they use idioms and sarcasm.

Technology

Can an iPad/Notebook be used for audio books if the teacher does silent reading in the class? Epic is a great app that has books that are read to the child, and they can follow along.

For independent work can this time be better spent using an App like Wordchain or Word Shark where you can build on and review concepts being taught, or maybe the school has a programme in place.

Accommodations

Some ideas maybe:

- one instruction at a time
 - Google Apps for education i.e. Typing, ReadWrite
 - sits close to the teacher.
 - no reading aloud
 - lots of brain breaks
 - hearing aids for APD
 - pencil grip for writing
 - no copying from the board
 - extra time
 - Class Visual Timetable
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Maths

If your child struggles with math, and you know what they are struggling with, let the teacher know that they need help with math facts, times tables etc and what supports can be put in place. Just like literacy.

Many dyslexics struggle with the times tables because we use the language part of our brain to learn them. We also need to be mindful that if your child isn't reading, they are not getting as much exposure to math language as others in the class are, and often word problems become an issue due to language not the math itself.

Programmes in School

Find out if the school has any programmes in place that could support what you or your child's tutor are working on. If yes, ask to get a better understanding of how it can help your child. Some schools are on board with using a Structured Literacy approach for intervention for dyslexic children and they may also use some apps or computer-based programmes like Word chain, Steps web, Core 5, Word shark to review the teaching that has been done in a 1:1 setting. The goal is always to have a teacher do the teaching, so make sure you find out if they are using a computer-based programme, and that you ask if anyone is teaching the concepts first or if the child is learning from the programme.

Note – schools buy a few programmes over the years for all sorts of things and then change them later on. You may find an old one that can still be used may suit your child's needs better.

Homework

If the work being sent home is irrelevant to your child's learning, ask if you can plan his homework and you can email the teacher each week. Examples may include a few things from the list below:

- decodable book and activities
- letter formations
- card games on the sounds the tutor is working on.
- phonological awareness activities
- phonemic awareness activities
- spelling words related to the sound or pattern he is currently learning.
- writing dictation sentences related to the knowledge they know already
- sound pack

Explain that this is more beneficial for your child to do this, than learn how to look up something on Google (as it's normally you that has to do that).

Anxiety/Behaviour/Social

We know kids can be affected in many ways because the school system is so hard for them. The cognitive overload for these kids is huge. If you have noticed they are anxious/angry about going to school, ask the teacher if this is transferring into the classroom environment. Find out if there are any resources in the school that can be utilised and implemented in the IEP. Ask what other options they can recommend that could be put in place to help even if it's outside of school.

We also recommend you read [Anxiety in Children](#).

A few things to keep in mind:

- Repeated from opening paragraph: Teachers will only know what he/she knows. Unless they have had training on how a dyslexic brain learns to read, the odds are, all they know is Balanced Literacy supplemented with the school phonics programme. Remember, it's only in the last 10 months we have started to see the Ministry of Education recognise Structured Literacy as best practice for dyslexics. This has not been rolled out to teacher training organisations or as wide-spread professional development for practising teachers. Teachers were, and still are, being taught

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- Always ask if your child is entitled to a teacher aide time.
- Ask if there is an option for you to come into school to help your child in class using a Structured Literacy approach you use at home. Explain that you would like to implement this in their school day. Could they provide a room, or would they allow you to bring your child into school an hour later each day so you can do it at home?
- You will probably find the school doesn’t have the resources or the money to fund assistance because schools get funding for Reading Recovery only and the small amount they can use may be being used to fund teachers aides etc.
- Many schools need help with fundraising and many parents are now approaching places like the Rotary Club to get funding for decodable books. Maybe this is an area you can offer to help.
- Try to stay calm – we know how hard this is but remember everyone at the table wants the same things and by talking and educating each other you will get a better outcome for your child.

Little tip – if you know the teachers are under the pump for time, offer to type up the IEP plan or keep the plan updated every term and you can email them the updated version. This will also give you a great understanding of where your child is and what needs to be achieved each term.

Take the time to read:

- **What is the Science of Reading?**
- **What is Structured Literacy?**
- **What does a Structured Literacy lesson look like in intervention?**

Keep calm and keep talking – good luck.

This document was created by Sharon Scurr founder of the deb in November 2020 and updated December 2021