

Understanding Dyslexia Diagnosis and Support in Western Australia

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

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Overview - Key Facts

Dyslexia is a specific learning disorder affecting reading, spelling, and writing, impacting up to 10% of children. It often co-occurs with dysgraphia (writing difficulties).

Diagnosis Process

Formal diagnosis (Specific Learning Disorder under DSM-5) involves:

- Psychologist: Cognitive/IQ assessment.
- Speech Pathologist: Language, phonological, literacy evaluation.
- Occupational Therapist (OT): If motor/handwriting issues present.

Role of Speech Pathologists (SLPs)

- Cannot provide standalone formal diagnosis but key in assessment and support.
- Conduct comprehensive evaluations of deficits in phonological awareness, reading, writing.
- Offer provisional findings, reports for therapy/school use, and targeted interventions.
- SLPs focus on literacy development; reports inform IEPs without full diagnosis.

School Supports & IEPs

- Individual Education Plans (IEPs): Document needs, accommodations (e.g., adjusted teaching, tech aids).
- Transferable between schools (primary to high) for continuity.
- WA Department of Education promotes inclusion; formal diagnosis not always required pre-Year 11.
- Up to Year 10: IEP sufficient for curriculum access, including NAPLAN/OLNA adjustments (extra time, scribes).

Assessment Accommodations

- NAPLAN/OLNA: Based on documented needs; no diagnosis needed if matches school supports.
- Years 11-12 (WACE/ATAR): Formal diagnosis required for special provisions (extra time, reader); case-by-case via SCSA with professional reports.

When to Pursue Diagnosis

Depends on goals: Therapy/classroom aids (SLP assessment enough); exams/funding (NDIS) need full team.

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning disorder that affects reading, spelling, and writing skills, despite adequate intelligence and education opportunities. It impacts up to 10% of children and can co-occur with other difficulties like dysgraphia (writing challenges). Early identification and support are key to helping children thrive.

The Diagnosis Process

A formal diagnosis of dyslexia (or Specific Learning Disorder in reading) typically involves a multidisciplinary team:

- Educational or Clinical Psychologist: Assesses cognitive abilities and confirms the diagnosis using criteria like DSM-5.
- Speech Pathologist: Evaluates language, phonological awareness, reading, and writing skills.
- Occupational Therapist (OT): If needed, for motor or handwriting issues (e.g., dysgraphia).

The process includes reviewing medical, developmental, family, and educational history, teacher observations, and standardised tests. In Western Australia, services like the Child Development Service or private practitioners can assist.

Diagnosis is not always immediate—seek professional advice if problems are severe. No strict timeline is mandated for all purposes, but current evidence of impact is often required for supports.

Role of Speech Pathologists

Speech pathologists (SLPs) play a crucial role in dyslexia support but typically do not provide a standalone formal diagnosis. Instead, they:

- Conduct comprehensive assessments of phonological awareness, language processing, reading comprehension, and writing skills.
- Identify deficits and provide provisional findings or recommendations for further confirmation by a psychologist.
- Develop targeted therapy to improve literacy, vocabulary, and communication.
- Contribute reports that inform school plans and interventions.

SLPs can support at all stages, from early identification to ongoing therapy.

School Supports and Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

In Western Australian public schools, students with dyslexia or learning difficulties can access supports through Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or similar documented plans. These outline personalised accommodations to ensure access to the curriculum.

- IEPs are based on assessed needs and can include adjusted teaching strategies, assistive technology, or modified assessments.
- Documentation from primary school can transfer to high school for continuity.
- The Department of Education WA promotes inclusive education for children with special needs, without always requiring a formal diagnosis for early supports.

Up to Year 10, an IEP is often sufficient for classroom accommodations.

Accommodations for Assessments

- NAPLAN and OLNA: Adjustments like extra time, coloured backgrounds, scribes, or rest breaks are available based on documented needs. A formal diagnosis isn't always required if the adjustment matches usual school supports.
- Year 11-12 Exams (WACE/ATAR): Special provisions (e.g., extra time, reader/scribe) require evidence of a diagnosis and ongoing impact, assessed case-by-case by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA). Reports from qualified professionals are needed.

When to Pursue a Diagnosis

The value of a formal diagnosis depends on your goals:

- For therapy or classroom supports: An SLP assessment may suffice initially.
- For exam accommodations, funding (e.g., NDIS), or long-term planning: A full team diagnosis is beneficial.

If transitioning to high school, share existing IEP details for seamless support.

For more help, contact a speech pathologist, psychologist, or the WA Department of Education.

Please contact Whiz Kids Therapy if you would like more information, or to discuss assessment or therapy options for your child.

