

# 1. Executive Summary

## Project Objectives

The 'No to Failure' project had clear aims:

1. To Communicate:

- Why Dyslexia-Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) training is essential – for quality-first teaching in the classroom and to provide Specialist Teachers to work with pupils with more complex Dyslexia-SpLD
- The links between pupils 'failing' and inadequate support for those with Dyslexia-SpLD

2. To Demonstrate:

- How to 'get it right' by developing exemplar 'Trailblazer' schools across the country
- Existing good practice against the background of prevailing inconsistency of provision in schools.

## Method

### General approach

'No to Failure' wanted to encourage schools to re-examine existing budgets, such as the School Development Grant, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Personalised Learning budgets, and question whether they were getting best value from these in terms of improving outcomes for pupils with SEN, and in gaining effective training and support in SEN.

'No to Failure' support for the Trailblazer schools was to link closely to the SEN Code of Practice with its focus on early identification and support by appropriately trained staff.

## Project actions

'No to Failure' set out to model different ways of 'getting it right', to encourage foundation and specialist training and to 'skill up' schools towards becoming fully inclusive. 'No to Failure' input aimed to help Teachers and Teaching Assistants feel more confident in their ability to provide quality-first teaching. For the pupils for whom it was necessary, 'No to Failure' provided specialist tuition.

A total of 19 schools in the three different Local Authorities participated in the intervention study with 1,164 pupils being screened in these schools (417 Year 3 pupils and 747 Year 7 pupils). All participants were first administered a group screening that comprised tests of reading, spelling and free writing.

Pupils who attained a standard score of 85 or less on either the reading and/or spelling tests (N = 416) were then administered an individual screening, which comprised a battery of standardised tests of reading efficiency, phonological awareness, verbal memory and reasoning skills.

Initial selection of 'at risk' pupils for specialist tuition was made in the context of background information and within the parameters of a two term programme where more pupils had been identified than could be taught within budget. Criteria were used as guidelines to ensure that pupils would be both appropriate and available for learning. Teachers naturally put forward pupils in greatest need of support. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) agreed further funding enabling 'No to Failure' to offer a term's specialist tuition to the remaining pupils who became the 'Comparison Group'.

'No to Failure' Specialist Tuition was planned as 20 individual/paired hour long lessons (often less in practice) - to start pupils on the path to success in a school which was becoming increasingly 'skilled up'. The Comparison Group received 10 hours of tuition in the Autumn term 2008.

#### **'No to Failure' offered:**

- Foundation training: whole staff awareness and understanding of Dyslexia-SpLD
- Specialist Teacher training
- Experience of screening, assessment, planning and delivery of individual learning programmes
- Resources to assist screening, assessment and support programmes
- Specialist tuition for 'at risk' pupils in year 3 or 7
- 'Master class' experience for Teaching Assistants 'shadowing' the specialist tuition
- Feedback to each school: screening and post test results and final reports on taught pupils

The project provided **Specialist Teachers**. These teachers use a toolkit of skills based on a thorough understanding of the structure of language. Their training includes the theory of literacy learning, the deficits which may underlie literacy difficulties including phonological deficits, and detailed understanding of phonological awareness, phonemic decoding and the phonic structure.

**Specialist Teaching** is developed from individual assessment. It is 'analytic' teaching, continually 'fine tuning' tuition to the learner's changing needs and developing skills. It aims to improve not only literacy, but also organisation, concentration and learning so that the pupil is able to access the curriculum, and become an independent learner.

It is **always** based on intensive specialist training and is multi-sensory, structured, cumulative, and individually tailored not only to a learner's needs but also his interests.

#### **In addition Specialist Teaching employs:**

- Synthetic phonics as the essential base - followed by carefully structured higher level phonics
- Teaching bypass strategies as well as necessary skills
- Metacognitive awareness - leading the pupil to understand his own strengths and weaknesses and strategies which work for him
- Deliberate targeting of the pupil's learning strengths, intelligences and learning styles to use in learning
- Wide range of imaginative and motivating techniques
- Knowledge and use of current technology
- Plenty of opportunities for over learning
- Study skills – explicitly taught
- Understanding the overlap between SpLDs
- Small, measurable steps - so that success can be seen
- Explicit goals and targets – fully understood by pupil and teacher
- Focus on raising self esteem by building confidence – based on measurable steps to success.

## **Local Authorities in the Project**

Local Authorities of Southwark, Cornwall and Calderdale were chosen. They represented diverse regions with a wide geographical spread, a balance of inner city, suburban and rural settings and a range of different schools. Each Local Authority worked 'No to Failure' into its existing plans and integrated it with other initiatives.

## **Project adaptability**

The flexibility of the 'No to Failure' project allowed each Local Authority to adapt it to their particular needs and to make it fit with existing initiatives. Teachers across the three very different Local Authorities acknowledged their common professional bond and recognised that parents of Dyslexic/SpLD pupils share the same concerns. Discussion on a stakeholders' day focused on the commonality of issues facing professionals and parents (despite the varying ways in which these are experienced by pupils) and the value of sharing the methods with which each Local Authority solved these issues through the project.

## **Dissemination**

'No to Failure' gave each Local Authority the chance, through regional roadshows, to demonstrate to a wider audience how the 'No to Failure' project linked with their own current initiatives. Delegates remarked favourably on the 'good fit' 'No to Failure' made with their existing plans. This secured a high level of commitment from Local Authorities and schools from the outset. All involved in 'No to Failure' had the powerful incentive of knowing that a full evaluation, with time for detailed reflection, was planned at the end of the project.

## **Results**

### **Commitment of school leadership**

It was clear that the commitment of the Headteacher and senior staff from each school was crucial for the project's success. A strategic approach from Headteachers in planning the staff workload was necessary to embed provision, within the school ethos, for pupils at risk of Dyslexia-SpLD.

Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo) and Teaching Assistants felt that the project was most effective in schools where the project was given priority, including giving staff time for full participation. In a few schools, teaching and support staff were worried that the work would not continue unless there was proactive support from the senior management team. All were keen for the work to continue.

### **Teacher benefit**

Teachers involved in the project saw the benefits of 'No to Failure' for individual pupils, for the school as a whole and for their own continued professional development (CPD).

### **Parents and Pupils**

Parents noticed the positive difference that the Specialist Teaching made to their children; not only within the school environment but also at home. Recognition and support for Dyslexia-SpLD removed fear of attending school, reduced frustration and difficult behaviour, boosted confidence and self-esteem, raised aspirations for the future and enabled pupils to become happier, more confident and more independent learners.

## Quantitative Evaluation of the Screening and Intervention

1. Of those pupils who had not achieved expected levels in Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), just over half (56%) were found through screening to be at risk of Dyslexia-SpLD.
2. Whatever the cause or causes underlying the pupils' literacy difficulties, the approaches taken by the Specialist Teachers had impact on their progress. The 'No to Failure' evaluation shows that with adjustments to teaching, in this case, Dyslexia-SpLD Specialist Teaching, pupils who are falling behind can make effective progress.
3. The proportion of pupils found to be at risk of Dyslexia-SpLD was relatively higher for Year 3 pupils (26%) than for Year 7 pupils (18%). Such age-related changes would be expected as a function of educational input, but nevertheless the results suggest that over four school years, from Year 3 to Year 7, less than a third of pupils who were at risk of educational failure had been lifted out of risk as a result of their schools' approaches to teaching, learning and whatever SEN provision had been made. However, two-thirds of the pupils remained at risk, underlining the need for teachers to be able to identify pupils at risk as early as possible so that appropriate intervention can be put in place sooner rather than later.
4. 15.5% of the total sample screened showed cognitive deficits, which are the hallmarks of Dyslexia-SpLD: phonological processing, phonemic decoding and working memory.
5. Of the pupils who were identified as at risk of Dyslexia-SpLD, two-thirds had phonological difficulties: 39% had poor phonic decoding skills and 28% had phonological processing deficits.
6. 58% were found to have a working memory deficit. International research has consistently shown that deficits in these cognitive abilities are the hallmarks of Dyslexia.
6. 'No to Failure' screening results suggest a link between pupils' 'at risk status' for Dyslexia-SpLD and the failure to reach expected targets in SATs.
7. The strongest impact of the intervention was on the pupils' spelling, and it is unclear whether this indicates that the focus of teaching was on spelling skills more than on reading skills.
8. Progress in response to the intervention was more marked for Year 3 than for Year 7 pupils, especially in phonemic decoding skills, confirming the common finding that younger pupils are easier to remediate than older ones.
9. The 'No to Failure' intervention study was successful in improving the skills of pupils in Year 3 and 7 who were found by screening to be at risk of Dyslexia-SpLD. The overall results provide encouraging support for the benefits not only of Specialist Teaching but also of using a screening approach to help identify at-risk pupils.
10. The positive conclusions are augmented by the gains shown by pupils in the Comparison Group when they were given a short programme of specialist tuition.

## Conclusions

1. The results of the 'No to Failure' research study demonstrate that Specialist Teaching works, and that even a fairly modest amount of Specialist Teacher input can make a marked difference to the literacy skills of Dyslexic/SpLD pupils.

2. 'No to Failure' input to schools was shown to be a cost-effective, sustainable support system for pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD.
3. Just over half (56%) of pupils who had not achieved expected levels in SATs were found to be at risk for Dyslexia-SpLD, based on the screening results. Fewer than half (44.5%) of the pupils who were found to be at risk were already on the SEN Register prior to screening. A further 8% were placed on the SEN Register as a direct consequence of the screening results. Nevertheless, almost half (48.5%) of the at-risk pupils were not on the SEN Register at any time during the project. The report discusses why these pupils were not on the SEN register, and the findings of the study underline the need for schools to have good access to expertise and procedures for identifying all pupils falling behind, including those with SEN, amongst whom would be pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD. Many of these pupils at present appear to be slipping through the net and are therefore making less progress than they might if they were to receive teaching tailored to their strengths and areas of difficulty.
4. The majority (64%) of the at-risk pupils in the study were in Year 7. Providing an effective intervention for these older pupils – who typically have more severe problems – in a very short period (an average of only 16.8 hours) is, of course, difficult but nevertheless some made gratifying gains. Simply preventing older pupils with more severe problems from slipping backwards relative to their more literate peers is an achievement in itself.
5. It is reasonable to suppose that the accelerated levels of progress would have continued if the Specialist Teaching had continued, as found in a study of East Court School reported by Thomson (2003).
6. The change for 'No to Failure' from a communication and demonstration project to a research model inevitably caused methodological problems and design limitations. These militated against the probability of finding strong positive impact of the intervention, but despite the limitations, the progress shown by the Intervention Group pupils compares well with figures reported in published studies of phonologically-based interventions in the USA and UK, particularly when the relatively brief duration of the present study is taken into account. The 'No to Failure' results also compare favourably with published studies of the long-term impact of teaching given in UK specialist Dyslexia schools and centres.
7. Positive outcomes of the project were augmented by the further finding that when pupils in the Comparison Group were given a short programme of specialist tuition (one hour a week for 10 weeks), they showed strong impact of the tuition on phonemic decoding, reading and spelling with significant improvement in all four measures used.
8. Specialist Dyslexia-SpLD Teachers have a key role to play in training Teachers and Teaching Assistants, in facilitating identification in the classroom, and in delivery and management of effective solutions for pupils identified with Dyslexia-SpLD.
9. In the current difficult economic climate it is especially noteworthy that the intervention provided in the 'No to Failure' study was comparatively inexpensive: the average amount of Specialist Teacher time was 16.8 hours,

which at a rate of, say, £35 per hour amounts to a total of only £588 per pupil (this figure does not include training and organisational costs). Obviously it is desirable (and in most cases almost certainly essential) that Specialist Teaching should continue for these pupils.

10. A short period of intervention cannot be expected to 'normalise' the literacy skills of every pupil and remove all need for support. But once real gains have been made in response to Specialist Teacher input, it should be possible increasingly for Teaching Assistants, working under the supervision of a Specialist Teacher, to be able to cater for these pupils' needs, thus reducing the costs of continuing support.
11. The core of the 'No to Failure' approach is the knowledge and experience of the Specialist, i.e. Dyslexia-SpLD, Teacher, who has the skills to identify and understand the pupil's problems and who can personalise tuition to each pupil's individual learning needs.

## Recommendations

### 1. NTF Training Pyramid

The NTF Project recommends training for professionals in education at Foundation and Specialist levels to ensure that all pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD have their needs met according to the requirements of the Code of Practice, i.e. 'early identification and timely support by appropriately trained staff'. A graphic representation is shown in the NTF Training Pyramid with its 3 levels.

#### NTF recommends:

##### Level 1 Foundation

All teachers in their initial teacher training, or for those already in post as Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and all Teaching Assistants,

should have training in the acquisition of literacy skills. That training should also include the identification, recognition and understanding of Dyslexia-SpLD and the principles of effective teaching and learning strategies in the classroom for pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD. These should cover phonological skills, phonics, multi-sensory teaching, supporting numeracy and creating a Dyslexia-SpLD friendly classroom.

##### Level 2 Certificate

At least one Lead Specialist Teacher in every school should be able to screen and assess pupils and teach those with more profound Dyslexia-SpLD. This specialist training includes transition planning and individual and small group personalised learning programmes.

##### Level 3 Diploma

At least one Expert Specialist Teacher in every school (or shared between a cluster of smaller schools) who can, in addition, carry out full diagnostic assessments, liaise with professionals from outside agencies, contribute to training of specialists, mentor Dyslexia-SpLD trained Teachers and assess for access arrangements at primary and secondary level. This more advanced specialist training follows and builds on the Lead Specialist Teacher qualification above.

### 2. Cost effective, sustainable solutions for pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD

Resources, in terms of finance, time and effort will best be spent on the key people, i.e. 'skilling up' the professionals so that they can make optimum use of existing resources within their schools and bring their skills and experience to generations of pupils.

Along with a desire to be given adequate time within the school day to carry out their roles, staff at all levels frequently said the top item on their

'wish-list' was a Specialist Teacher. They also said that the Specialist Teacher should be on the school staff, recognising that this would raise their own skill levels and mean consistency and sustainability within the school. (Note: Southwark has high staff turnover but aims to train a new teacher every time one leaves so that the borough, as a whole, maintains its team of Specialist Teaching staff.)

**All** schools must have good access to expertise and procedures for identifying, at the earliest opportunity, **all** pupils falling behind, including those with SEN, among whom would be pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD. Part of that process must be the enhancement of the knowledge base and expertise of **all** Teachers to notice when pupils are not making appropriate progress, to adjust their teaching accordingly and to seek specialist tuition for those who need it.

**All** Teachers and Teaching Assistants should have Dyslexia-SpLD training so that they are able to deliver quality first teaching in the classroom and personalised teaching to those who need it. With this improved training for **all** Teachers and Teaching Assistants far fewer pupils will need the support of a Specialist Teacher. A huge, and far reaching additional benefit, is that the teaching techniques and strategies for pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD will help **all** pupils.

Specialist Teachers are needed to guide provision for pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD, teach those with more severe difficulties and support staff on a day to day basis to ensure that good practice occurs across the curriculum in every school. Specialist Teachers work to develop a range of learning skills which are needed by Dyslexic-SpLD learners, beyond phonics instruction and literacy. The assumption is that by secondary school, pupils have established literacy and learning skills sufficient to access the curriculum. 'No to Failure' results show that this is

not universally the case. Therefore it is even more important that there are Specialist Teachers in secondary schools because their teachers do not typically have training to teach literacy.

'No to Failure' input to schools was shown to be a cost effective, sustainable support system for pupils at risk of Dyslexia-SpLD. Steps should now be taken to make similar provision in **all** schools so that pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD are identified and supported at the earliest opportunity. It is not acceptable for pupil's learning difficulties to go unidentified or inadequately supported until KS2 or beyond.

**NTF has communicated and demonstrated the need for Dyslexia-SpLD training for Teachers and Teaching Assistants as central to the long term, effective, value-for-money, sustainable solution for pupils with Dyslexia-SpLD.**

