

**All Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia
Response to the SEND Consultation, May 2026**



Summary

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Dyslexia welcomes the Government's ambition to reform the SEND system and improve inclusion. However, the APPG is concerned that the current proposals do not sufficiently recognise or address the needs of children and young people with dyslexia¹.

A central concern is the removal of "Cognition and Learning" from the proposed SEND code of practice. The APPG believes this creates a significant gap, as persistent literacy and numeracy difficulties do not map clearly onto the proposed areas of development. Without explicit recognition of cognition and learning needs, there is a serious risk that dyslexia will become less visible within the system, leading to delayed identification, inappropriate intervention and widening inequity.

Too many children continue to rely on schools alone to identify dyslexia because state-funded diagnostic pathways remain extremely limited. Identification is inconsistent, particularly for girls, children with English as an Additional Language, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds². At the same time, many teachers and teaching assistants do not have the knowledge and skills to recognise the early signs of dyslexia and literacy difficulties, SENDCos are frequently overstretched, and there is a serious shortage of specialist teachers and assessors with expertise in dyslexia.

The APPG is also concerned that the accountability framework around Individual Support Plans (ISPs) is too weak to build family confidence that support will be delivered consistently and reviewed meaningfully. In addition, local authorities often lack sufficient understanding of prevalence and need. Recent research from the British Dyslexia Association, found that only two out of 152 councils have been able to identify how many children in their area have dyslexia or literacy difficulties³, making it difficult to plan provision, commission services or develop workforce capacity effectively.

Finally, the APPG emphasises the strong relationship between literacy difficulties and wellbeing. Persistent difficulties with reading and writing are closely linked to anxiety, low self-esteem, school avoidance and disengagement from learning. Early identification and effective intervention are therefore essential not only for educational outcomes, but also for mental health and wellbeing.

Recommendations

- retain "Cognition and Learning" within the areas of development

¹ Dyslexia commonly co-occurs with other specific learning difficulties, such as dysgraphia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia, and also other neurodivergent diagnoses such as ADHD.

² Daniel et al Specific Learning Difficulties: Disparities in Identification, Journal of Learning Disabilities, 2026

³ [BDA Lost in the System report 2026](#)

- explicitly recognise dyslexia within national guidance
- introduce universal early screening and stronger early identification pathways
- expand the specialist workforce, including dyslexia specialists and assessors
- strengthen accountability and review mechanisms within Individual Support Plans.
- ensure Inclusion Bases and “Experts at Hand” models include dyslexia specialist teachers as well as literacy and numeracy experts.
- improve national and local data collection on dyslexia and literacy difficulties
- ensure mainstream inclusion is properly resourced and supported by specialist expertise.

About the APPG for Dyslexia

The APPG is chaired by myself, Juliet Campbell MP, and it serves as a cross-party forum for parliamentarians to engage with lived experience, research, and best practice, helping to inform and influence government policy on dyslexia and related specific learning difficulties. It raises awareness in Parliament and across the UK of the social, educational, and economic impact of dyslexia, while also producing evidence-based recommendations that draw on stakeholder expertise and the voices of those with lived experience.

The APPG is grateful for the support provided by the British Dyslexia Association as the Group's secretariat in formulating this response, as well as to the many organisations and individuals who have contributed insights and expertise that informed this response.

Introduction

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Dyslexia welcomes the Government's ambition to reform the SEND system and its stated commitment to earlier intervention, greater inclusion and improved consistency of support for children and young people with additional needs.

However, the APPG remains deeply concerned that the current proposals do not adequately recognise, understand or respond to the needs of children and young people with dyslexia.

The APPG's work with parliamentarians, educators, researchers, parents, young people and specialist practitioners has consistently highlighted that learners with dyslexia are among the groups most likely to fall through gaps within the current system.

While many children with other forms of SEND may enter established diagnostic or medical pathways, most children with dyslexia do not. State-funded diagnostic assessment remains extremely limited and, in many areas, inaccessible. As a result, the overwhelming majority of children with persistent literacy difficulties rely entirely on schools identifying their needs accurately and early.

At present, this is not happening consistently enough. The APPG continues to hear evidence from families across England that children with significant reading, writing and spelling difficulties are routinely missed, misunderstood or unsupported for years. This is particularly true for girls, children with English as an Additional Language (EAL), and children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are significantly less likely to be identified early or referred for specialist assessment⁴. This inequity is one of the defining challenges within the SEND system for learners with dyslexia. We can see this reflected in recent Parent Voice survey of over 6000 parents which showed that parents of SEND pupils without ECHPs feel the least satisfied with schools⁵.

⁴ Daniel et al., Specific Learning Difficulties: Disparities in Identification, Journal of Learning Disabilities, 2026

⁵ <https://theparentvoiceproject.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Parent%20Voice%20Project%20Report%202.pdf>

Areas for development

The APPG considers this to be one of the most serious weaknesses within the consultation proposals. Without an explicit cognition and learning domain, dyslexia risks becoming effectively invisible within the system. Persistent literacy and numeracy difficulties do not map naturally onto the proposed areas of development. There is a substantial risk that learners with dyslexia will instead be categorised primarily through behavioural, communication or emotional presentations, rather than through the underlying learning needs driving those difficulties.

This matters because early identification depends on schools understanding and monitoring the developmental foundations of literacy and numeracy. Children at risk of dyslexia frequently present with difficulties in:

- **Phonological awareness** – the ability to recognise and work with the sounds within words, such as identifying rhymes, syllables and individual speech sounds.
- **Decoding** – the skill of translating written letters and letter patterns into spoken words when reading.
- **Spelling development** – the process of learning how sounds, letter patterns and language rules are used to spell words accurately.
- **Verbal memory** – the ability to remember and recall spoken information, such as instructions, words or sequences of sounds.
- **Working memory** – the capacity to hold and use information in the mind for a short period while completing a task.
- **Processing speed** – the rate at which a person can take in, understand and respond to information.
- **Reading fluency** – the ability to read accurately, smoothly and with appropriate pace and expression.
- **Number sense** – an understanding of numbers, quantity and numerical relationships that supports mathematical thinking and problem-solving.

If these are not explicitly represented within the national framework, there is a real risk they will not be systematically identified or monitored. The likely result will be delayed intervention, widening inequity and increasing reliance on private diagnosis.

Data collection and mapping need

The APPG is particularly concerned that the reforms could unintentionally deepen existing inequalities. Families with financial means will continue to seek private assessment and specialist tuition, while children without those advantages may remain unidentified for years. This is already happening across many parts of England.

The APPG's engagement with local authorities has also exposed a profound lack of national understanding about prevalence and need. Only two out of 152 local authorities have been able to state how many children in their area have dyslexia or

literacy difficulties⁶. This statistic should concern policymakers deeply as without robust local and national data on prevalence, local authorities cannot effectively:

- model demand
- commission specialist services
- plan workforce capacity
- allocate resources strategically
- ensure equitable access to intervention and assessment

This absence of system-wide understanding has significant consequences for children and families.

Workforce capacity and specialist expertise

The APPG is also concerned about workforce capacity across the education system. Too many teachers and teaching assistants still report low confidence in recognising the early signs of dyslexia and literacy difficulties. In many schools, guidance on how to respond when a child struggles with literacy remains unclear, inconsistent or overly dependent on a narrow interpretation of SSP.

The SEND workforce challenge extends beyond initial teacher knowledge. SENDCos are increasingly overstretched and often expected to manage highly complex responsibilities without sufficient protected time, specialist expertise or access to external support. Many SENDCos report difficulty accessing educational psychologists, specialist teachers and literacy specialists in a timely manner.

The specialist workforce itself is under severe strain. There is a serious national shortage of specialist dyslexia teachers, dyslexia assessors and practitioners with expertise in literacy difficulties. A recent survey from the National Education Union, found that 70% of teachers said there was lack of access to specialist services⁷. While the APPG welcomes the consultation's focus on workforce development, it is not currently convinced that the scale of training proposed will be sufficient to build the capacity schools require.

The APPG believes that training must move beyond awareness alone, and should include early identification of literacy and numeracy difficulties, evidence-based intervention and phonological awareness and decoding. Importantly, this training must be accompanied by substantial investment in specialist workforce expansion. Mainstream inclusion cannot succeed if schools are expected to deliver increasingly complex support without access to specialist expertise.

Early identification, assessment and intervention

The APPG also believes the reforms must place far greater emphasis on early identification.

⁶ British Dyslexia Association, *Lost in the System*, 2026

⁷ <https://neu.org.uk/latest/press-releases/neu-members-survey-confirms-schools-are-running-empty#:~:text=Almost%20three%20quarters%20of%20teachers,of%20teachers%20leaving%20the%20profession>

Universal provision must include structured screening and monitoring approaches in the early years and Key Stage 1. The APPG also believes there must be far clearer national pathways to specialist assessment where interventions are not leading to expected progress. At present, access to assessment varies dramatically depending on geography, school capacity and family resources.

Research from the University of Durham and Oxford has highlighted substantial disparities between schools and local areas in rates of identification and access to assessment for dyslexia⁸. Without national consistency, inequity will persist.

Individual Support Plans and accountability

The APPG welcomes the ambition behind Individual Support Plans (ISPs) but remains concerned that the current accountability framework is too weak. Parents and carers need confidence that support described within ISPs will actually be delivered consistently and reviewed meaningfully. The APPG continues to hear from families who experience repeated cycles of generic targets, limited review and insufficient specialist involvement.

For ISPs to command confidence, they must:

- clearly identify literacy and numeracy difficulties where present
- specify evidence-based interventions
- include measurable outcomes
- reflect the learner's voice
- contain meaningful review cycles
- include specialist input where cognition and learning needs are suspected
- provide clear escalation routes where progress remains limited

The APPG also believes accountability mechanisms must be strengthened more broadly.

Schools, trusts and local authorities should be required to demonstrate how they identify and support cognition and learning needs, including outcomes for children with persistent literacy and numeracy difficulties.

Inspection frameworks need to explore effectiveness of early identification, quality of intervention, access to specialist expertise and literacy and numeracy outcomes for learners with dyslexia.

Mental health and wellbeing

The APPG is additionally concerned that the reforms place insufficient emphasis on the relationship between literacy difficulties and wellbeing. Persistent struggles with reading and writing are strongly associated with anxiety, low self-esteem, school avoidance and disengagement from learning.

⁸ Daniel et al., Specific Learning Difficulties: Disparities in Identification, Journal of Learning Disabilities, 2026

For many dyslexic learners, repeated experiences of failure fundamentally shape their confidence and relationship with education. Difficulties which are not recognised early can lead children and young people to internalise the belief that they are “less able” than their peers, despite often having average or above average intelligence. Over time, this can significantly affect motivation, participation, behaviour and aspirations.

The APPG continues to hear from children, young people and families who describe years of frustration before needs are properly identified. Many pupils experience humiliation, exhaustion and chronic anxiety associated with reading aloud, written tasks, examinations and repeated comparisons with peers. Others develop avoidance strategies or disengage from school altogether.

There is also evidence that children with unidentified or unsupported dyslexia are at increased risk of school-based distress, attendance difficulties and mental health challenges, particularly where literacy difficulties are misunderstood as poor behaviour, lack of effort or disengagement.

Early identification and effective intervention are therefore not simply educational priorities; they are protective factors for mental health and wellbeing. The APPG believes that schools and colleges must be better supported to understand the emotional and psychological impact of persistent literacy and numeracy difficulties. Staff across education settings should receive training on how dyslexia can affect confidence, emotional regulation, participation and school engagement.

Wellbeing support should not be separated from learning support. Children experiencing anxiety linked to reading, writing or academic performance require joined-up responses that address both emotional wellbeing and underlying learning needs. Young people consistently report that one of the most significant contributors to distress is feeling misunderstood or unheard within the education system. A genuinely inclusive SEND system must therefore recognise that supporting literacy and numeracy development is inseparable from supporting wellbeing, belonging and long-term outcomes.

Recommendations

The APPG urges the Government to implement the following recommendations to the proposals, to enable them to fulfil the ambition of building a truly inclusive education system for all:

- retain “Cognition and Learning” within the areas of development
- explicitly recognise dyslexia within national guidance
- introduce universal early screening and stronger early identification pathways
- expand the specialist workforce, including dyslexia specialists and assessors
- strengthen accountability and review mechanisms within ISPs
- ensure Inclusion Bases and “Experts at Hand” models include dyslexia specialist teachers as well as literacy and numeracy experts.
- improve national and local data collection on dyslexia and literacy difficulties
- ensure mainstream inclusion is properly resourced and supported by specialist expertise.

Conclusion

The APPG believes there is a significant opportunity within these reforms to create a more inclusive, coherent and equitable SEND system. There is broad support for the Government's ambition to strengthen mainstream inclusion, improve consistency of support and intervene earlier before needs escalate.

But these ambitions will not be realised for children and young people with dyslexia, unless cognition and learning needs are explicitly recognised and embedded throughout the framework. At present, the proposals risk leaving a substantial group of learners without a clear place within the system. Without explicit recognition of the cognitive processes underpinning dyslexia and dyscalculia, there is a real danger that these needs will continue to be overlooked, misidentified or addressed too late.

Delayed identification contributes directly to widening attainment gaps, growing mental health difficulties, school disengagement and reduced life chances. It also drives parental frustration, increasing demand for EHCPs and greater pressure on already stretched schools and local authorities.

The APPG is particularly concerned that, without stronger safeguards, the reforms could unintentionally deepen existing inequalities. Families who can afford private assessment and tutoring will continue to secure support for their children, while those without financial means may remain dependent on inconsistent local systems that too often fail to identify need early enough.

The reforms must therefore be underpinned by:

- explicit recognition of cognition and learning needs
- strengthened national pathways to assessment and intervention
- universal early identification approaches
- an expanded specialist workforce
- stronger accountability for delivery of support
- improved national and local data collection

Children and young people with dyslexia can and do thrive when their needs are understood early and supported effectively. The evidence base for what works is strong. The challenge now is ensuring that the SEND system reflects that evidence in practice.

The APPG therefore urges the Government to strengthen the proposals before implementation and to ensure that the needs of children and young people with dyslexia are central to the future SEND framework. Only then will the reforms deliver the equitable, evidence-based and genuinely inclusive system that children, young people and families need.