

THE SCOTTISH ADVICE SERVICE FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

Welcome

This issue of *Enquire Within* includes new and interesting features on topics parents have told us they want more help and advice on.

Read our top tips for getting actively involved in your child's education, find out the truth behind some of the most commonly held myths about additional support for learning and read about the working life of an Enquire helpline adviser. 'A day in the life of...' is the first in a series of interviews with key professionals involved in additional support for learning. In the next issue we'll be talking to an educational psychologist.

We hope you find our new features useful. As always, we want to hear your views. If you have comments on the newsletter, have ideas on issues you think we should be looking at or would like to receive this regular newsletter via email please contact us at:

info@enquire.org.uk

Contents

Page 1

Unique consultation asks for parents' and pupils' views on educational services

National dyslexia conference

Centre pages

A day in the life of...

Tips on being actively involved in your child's education

Demystifying ASL myths

Page 4

Case study

News: ASL Tribunal annual report available online

News: Results of ASL consultation



Unique consultation asks for parents' and pupils' views on educational services

Over 1,200 children, young people and their parents have shared their views on the additional support for learning services available to them.

North Ayrshire Education Services commissioned Children in Scotland to carry out the consultation using surveys, focus groups and interviews. To the best of our knowledge, no other local authority has sponsored such an extensive, independent consultation process with the intended beneficiaries of the law relating to additional support needs.

The results of the six-month process are expected soon and in light of this, this newsletter contains some practical tips for parents on how to get the best out of their dealings with additional support for learning professionals, as well as the good practice that parents should expect from professionals (see centre pages).

We know from calls to the Enquire helpline that parents and professionals across Scotland have a desire for clearer communications and stronger relationships in terms of additional support needs and that working together in a structured way can help achieve this.

A summary version of the final report will be distributed locally by North Ayrshire Educational Services in the new school term. The full research will be available shortly afterwards to download free from Children in Scotland's website. www.childreninScotland.org.uk

National dyslexia conference

Dyslexia Scotland will hold its one-day annual conference on 27 September, in Edinburgh. This year's speakers include Dr. Joseph Torgesen, who has been conducting research with children who have learning problems for over 30 years and Dr John Everatt, who has a particular interest in learning difficulties associated with reading and writing, and how learning differences relate to language background. **For further information contact Dyslexia Scotland on (01786) 44 66 50 and www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk**

Enquire helpline: 0845 123 2303

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A day in the life of ... an **Enquire** helpline adviser

This is the first in a series of interviews with professionals who are involved in supporting children with additional support needs, and their parents. The Enquire helpline takes calls every weekday from a broad range of people including young people, parents and professionals who need information or advice on additional support needs.

What is the role of an Enquire helpline adviser?

I listen to callers describe their problems and try to suggest ways of moving the situation forward. I try to build a clear picture before I begin to offer advice and information. Most queries can be answered there and then, others may need me to do some research or ask the opinion of my colleagues before calling back. Queries also come in by e-mail or from the Enquire website. I need to keep up-to-date on relevant legislation and guidance and receive regular training on this as well as on telephone skills. Sometimes I need to be able to signpost the caller to a more relevant organisation or a more local source of help.

What's involved in a typical day?

Every morning I check that the phone lines are open and follow up any messages. There are always three of us on duty and answering calls is our main priority. With the caller's permission, I input a brief summary of their query on the confidential database and send them relevant information and publications. I use quieter times to update my knowledge by reading or researching on the Internet. I also contribute to Enquire publications and update our office information files.

What kind of enquiries do you deal with on a typical day?

No two calls are exactly the same and I can still be asked questions I haven't been asked before!

The enquiries cover all aspects of education for children and young people with additional support needs. There is no set pattern but many calls are about the identification and

assessment of additional support needs, getting the right support in school, exclusions, appeals and resolving disagreements.

What's the most rewarding part of the job?

Providing a listening ear to someone who feels no one is hearing them and helping them to find a way forward. Being able to give clear and accurate information to support callers is also very rewarding. And it's nice when I hear back from callers to tell me how things have changed for the better since they last contacted us.

What is the least rewarding part of the job?

Hearing about the extreme difficulties facing some callers and being aware that finding a way forward will not be simple for them.

What constraints or barriers do you face in your job?

Answering an email enquiry can be tricky if not enough information is given. This often makes the reply quite complicated or I may have to email back asking for more details. Finding there is no local source of support for a caller who may need practical help with letters or meetings can also be quite challenging.

What would you say to parents who have a concern or need some information, but are unsure about calling the helpline?

The helpline is totally confidential unless I think a child is at risk. It's staffed by friendly, knowledgeable advisers who are here to listen, and often just talking through a concern can help someone see their own way forward.

**In the next issue – a day in the life of... an educational psychologist.*

Tips on being actively involved in your child's education

- Be prepared to share information so that you and the school can work together as partners in your child's best interest. For example, let the school know about your child's likes, dislikes, strengths, difficulties, any worries they might have or changes at home so that they can try to provide the most appropriate environment.
- Remember that your child's views should be taken into account by the school.
- Agree with the school how you can be kept up-to-date on developments.
- Tell the school if you need information in a particular format.
- Ask who you should contact if you have any concerns about the support your child is receiving.
- Try to attend meetings about your child if at all possible, and here are some more detailed tips about getting the most out of them.
 - Tell the school if you need plenty advance notice of meeting dates.
 - Be as prepared as possible – write down the points you want to cover and any queries you have.
 - If you wish, take a supporter or advocate along to meetings.
 - Take notes or get your supporter to take notes.
 - Misunderstandings can happen so don't be afraid to check that you have been understood or to ask if anything is unclear.
 - Encourage your child to be involved where appropriate.
 - Use meetings to ask questions and get information.
 - Make use of Enquire. Enquire factsheet 6, *Parental participation in meetings* has more information on how parents can get involved in meetings.
- If you need to write a letter to the school, it's a good idea to put a date on it and ask for a reply by a certain date. Keep a copy for yourself and contact the person again if you don't get a reply.
- Try to resolve any differences informally.
- Ask about mediation if relationships have broken down.
- If you wish, ask about the parent council or other practical ways you can help the school.



Useful resources for getting involved in your child's education:

- *Making the Difference* leaflets including *Getting involved in your child's school* are available from your child's school or see links on the Parentzone website below.
- Parentzone www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentzone/
- Parents as partners in learning www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentsaspartnerinlearning/index.asp
- Make use of Enquire resources. Enquire's range of practical factsheets and guides are all available free of charge by post or from our website at www.enquire.org.uk or you may like to call our confidential helpline on 0845 123 2303.



Demystifying ASL myths

Enquire reveals the truth behind some of the most common myths about additional support for learning

A child who receives a particular kind of support in one school may not require the same support in a different school.

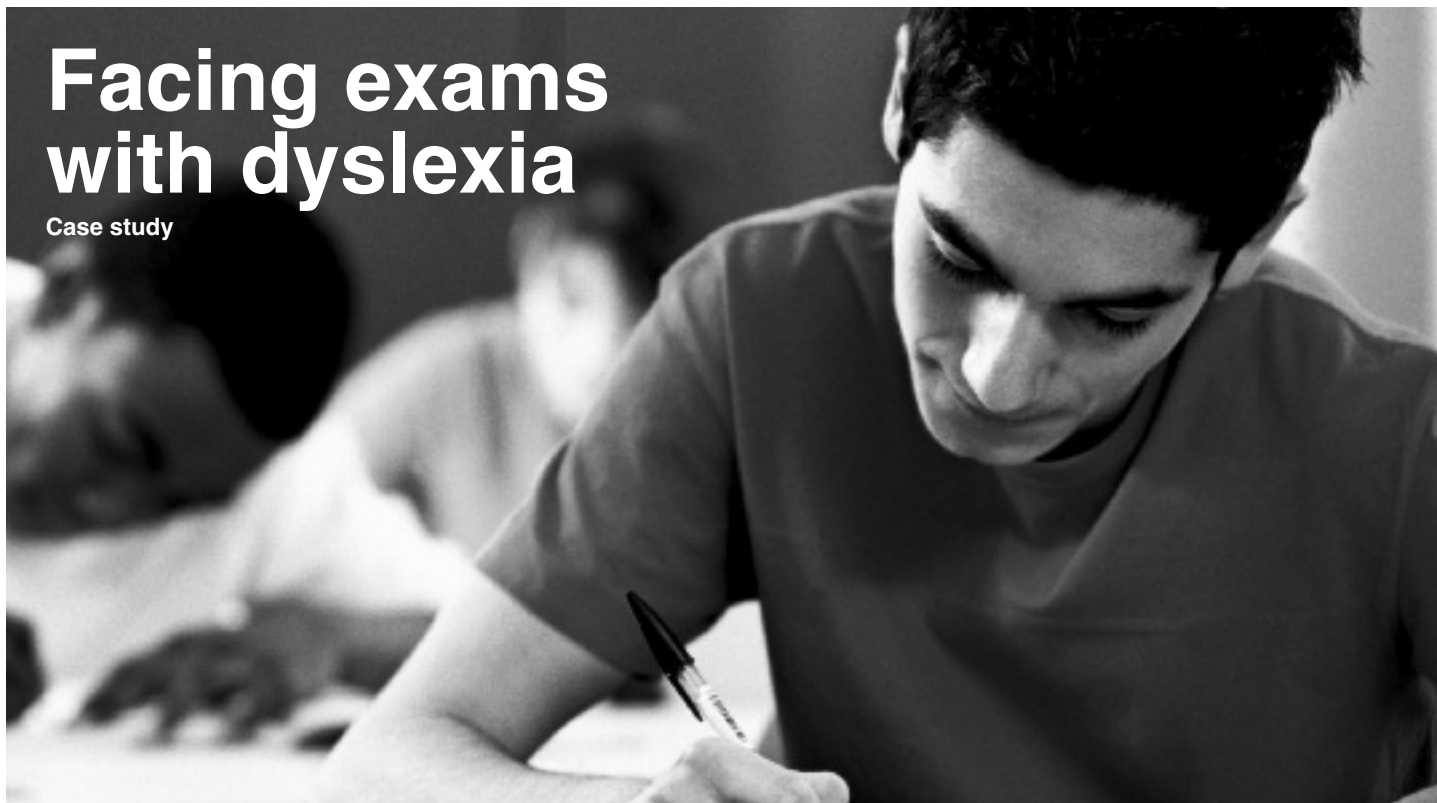
A child's need for additional support depends on a number of different factors such as individual teachers' training and knowledge, the school environment and differentiated curriculum. A child may not require additional support in one school because their teacher has the very specific skills and resources necessary to give them the extra help they need within the classroom. This might not be the case in a different school.

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Facing exams with dyslexia

Case study



Peter is dyslexic and beginning to prepare for his standard grade exams. His mother calls *Enquire* because she is worried about how he will cope with the exams and to find out what extra help he can get.

Peter is 15-years-old and has just entered fourth year at mainstream secondary school where he is expected to sit eight standard grade exams. Peter has dyslexia and since primary school has received extra help with his reading and writing including input from a learning support teacher, photo-copied handouts of class work and extra time to complete his written work. His mother, Mrs Forbes, calls *Enquire* because she is concerned about how Peter will manage his exams and to find out what extra help he can expect.

Enquire advises Mrs Forbes that Peter can expect the same type and level of support in his prelims and exams as he receives with his class work. *Enquire* suggests that Mrs Forbes get in touch with Peter's guidance teacher to talk through her concerns and to find out what arrangements the school are planning to put in place to support Peter with his exams.

Enquire told Mrs Forbes that there is guidance about exam arrangements for children with additional support needs on the Scottish Qualifications Association's website. Although aimed at teachers and lecturers, it contains useful information on how

schools decide what help and support children need.

Enquire explained that this guidance says that schools should consider the individual needs of each pupil when thinking about the type and level of support they should have for their exams and that this should be done for each subject. *Enquire* explained that this may mean that Peter receives more support in some subjects than in others – for example some pupils may not need help with multiple choice exam papers but may need a scribe for written ones.

Mrs Forbes is worried that Peter will find exam conditions stressful. *Enquire* explained to Mrs Forbes that if the support Peter receives is reviewed and changes are made, then it is essential that the new type of support – for example computer technology or reader and scribe – is put into place immediately for class work and assessments. This will enable Peter to build up his expertise and confidence in using it, giving him the opportunity to develop his full potential. He should then be able to tackle his exams without too much stress. Depending on the type of support he receives, he may also be able to sit his exams in a separate room.

This case study is based on real situations but details and names have been changed so that individual cases cannot be identified.

ASL Tribunal annual report available online

The president of the ASL Tribunal – the service which hears cases, brought by parents of children and young people who have, or think they should have, a coordinated support plan, has published her annual report for 2007/2008.

You can read this online at: www.asntscotland.gov.uk

The report includes information on the 72 references to the Tribunal during 2007/08. It also includes comments on good practice and concerns about the use and quality of co-ordinated support plans and the way in which parents are told decisions about a child's education.

Results of ASL consultation

People's responses to a public consultation on the effectiveness of additional support needs law have been published.

The Scottish Government is currently analysing the responses and will publish this analysis later in the year.

You can read all responses to the consultation at:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/16110426/0

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