



“Set up for somebody else”:
Young people with dyslexia
in the education system

October 2025



Foreword

Ryman

Since 2023, I've had the great pleasure to be the British Dyslexia Association's Dyslexia Empowerment Patron, because, like 1 in 10 people in the UK, I am dyslexic.

This report is important in understanding the lived experience of dyslexic young people; shining a light on how dyslexia really affects daily life, their experience of education and importantly their wellbeing. This report is a window into the impact of dyslexia on them and their families, something I know all too well, and why I and my business, Ryman, are delighted to sponsor it.

The report champions for early diagnosis, meaningful support, and the empowerment of those with dyslexia, encouraging every individual to positively achieve their potential.

I was the young child in school who struggled and did not receive the support needed, and although I knew I was just as capable as my peers, reading and writing presented challenges that I had to overcome with different workarounds, many of which still help me today. Yet, it does not have to be so difficult. The findings in this report show that we need to go further - ninety percent of young people with dyslexia, and their parents, find life more challenging than their peers without dyslexia. Let's change this.

There is, however, real pride among the dyslexic community: more than two in five surveyed see their dyslexia as a superpower. We must build on this, helping even more young people feel

confident to work with their dyslexia, rather than feel compelled to hide it. This is about changing attitudes, strengthening support, and fostering positivity in every dyslexic journey.

Ryman and I are passionate about advocating for accessible dyslexia screening for all young people and advancing training for educators so that awareness and support are improved across schools and workplaces alike. As a Dyslexia Friendly Employer, at Ryman, we see the positives of dyslexia day in, day out.

I urge each of you to read this report. Its conversations with young people and their families shine a critical light on barriers to diagnosis and gaps in support, but also highlight the resilience and creativity within the dyslexic community.

This report is just the beginning. So, whether you are an MP, policymaker, educator, or simply someone committed to making a difference, please read and share the report and advocate its findings. Let's empower the futures of dyslexic young people, ensuring that no young person's life is ever limited by their dyslexia.

Theo Paphitis

Dyslexia Empowerment Patron,
British Dyslexia Association and Chairman,
Ryman

Executive summary

About this report

Dyslexia affects more than 1 million children in classrooms across the UK¹. Despite its prevalence, most children with dyslexia are not identified and have to navigate the education system without appropriate support. Based on research with children, young people and their parents, this report explores the impacts of navigating a system that feels like it was “set up for somebody else”, and sets out what is needed now to build a more equal and inclusive education system where every learner is supported and given the chance to succeed.

Key findings

Children with dyslexia face a range of negative outcomes which extend beyond attainment in school, with 9 in 10 young people and their parents judging the young person’s life to be ‘more difficult’ than their peers.

Whilst some children and young people are able to identify strengths that come with dyslexia, many experience poor self-esteem, embarrassment and anxiety and often express a desire for more understanding and support.

Early identification of dyslexia is crucial but, in reality, opportunities are often missed.

Whilst a formal diagnosis can improve both access to support and the quality of support that children receive, financial barriers mean that this is not available to all children equally.

Whilst almost two thirds of children and young people surveyed felt the support they receive for their dyslexia at school is ‘good’, more than a third described it as only ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ - they describe inconsistencies in support, a lack of knowledge and understanding of dyslexia amongst their teachers, and feeling singled out.

Despite the availability of tools to improve outcomes for children with dyslexia, these are not always used and parents are frustrated by the lack of access to assistive technology in schools, as well as the rigidity of the curriculum and assessment styles.

Despite the challenges, children, young people and their parents are optimistic about the ability of the education system to improve and identified a number of opportunities for change.

Recommendations

1. Make children with dyslexia a priority

The Department for Education must develop a National Dyslexia Strategy, appoint a policy lead for dyslexia and improve annual data collection and reporting on children with dyslexia in schools.

2. Ensure early identification and equity in access to support

The Department for Education must roll out a universal pathway for assessment, develop a simple, in-classroom screening tool and review the use of the Year 1 Phonics Check to ensure it is fit-for-purpose.

3. Create ‘dyslexia-friendly’ classrooms

The Department for Education must establish a national standard of SEN support, on statutory footing, and set out clear expectations for initial and ongoing CPD training for teachers and school staff in relation to dyslexia.

4. Widen the scope of the curriculum and assessment

The Department for Education must introduce explicit teaching of assistive technology to help reading and spelling from Key Stage 2, provide vocational and functional pathways alongside GCSEs and ensure GCSE assessment techniques better reflect the skills of all learners.

Key statistics

- 70% of young people said their dyslexia makes them feel bad about themselves
- 78% of young people said people assume they are not clever because of their dyslexia
- 59% of young people have been bullied or teased about their dyslexia
- 65% of young people hide their dyslexia
- 90% of young people in high income households (£100k+) are diagnosed, compared to only 43% in lowest income households (less than £30k)
- Only 30% of young people in lower income households (less than £30k) say support is “good” in school compared to 86% of young people in high income households (£100k+)

¹ British Dyslexia Association. Dyslexia Factsheet. Based on these statistics, British Dyslexia Association estimates that - in England alone - there will be more than 900,000 children in classrooms with dyslexia across the country. Department for Education (2025) Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2024/25.



Introduction

Dyslexia affects about 1 in 10 people, including more than 1 million children in classrooms across the UK¹. It primarily affects reading and writing skills, and sometimes the ability to process and remember information. This, in turn, can affect learning and the acquisition of literacy skills - without which children can struggle to access the whole curriculum. Whilst there are positives to thinking differently, this can have life-long impacts for those without access to the right support - something that too many children with dyslexia are currently going without.

Drawing on the experiences of 500 children, young people and their parents, this report explores the impacts of navigating a system that feels like it was “**set up for somebody else**”, and sets out what is needed now to build a more equal and inclusive education system where every learner - including all dyslexic learners - are supported, understood and given the chance to succeed.

“She’s not ashamed of it. But I wouldn’t say she was proud. It’s an inconvenience. It means she gets singled out by the system. It will mean she does less well than her neurotypical peers [...] The system is set up for somebody else and then just has this [negative] impact.”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

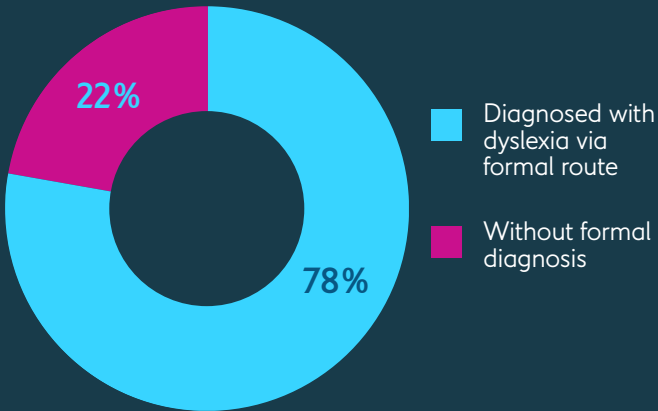
¹ British Dyslexia Association. Dyslexia Factsheet. Based on these statistics, British Dyslexia Association estimates that - in England alone - there will be more than 900,000 children in classrooms with dyslexia across the country. Department for Education (2025) Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic year 2024/25.



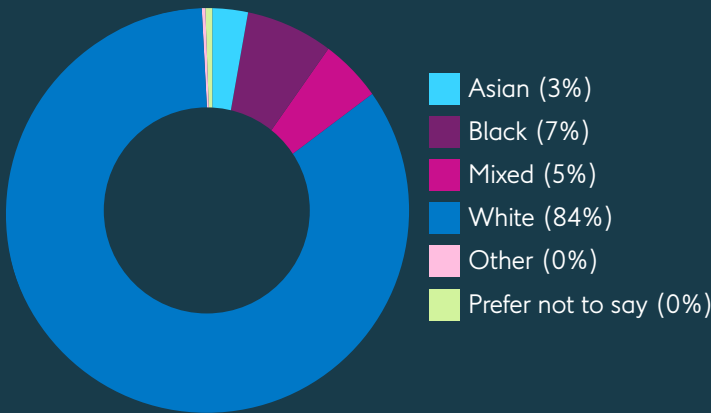
About this research

This report has been produced by the British Dyslexia Association, in partnership with M-E-L Research. It draws on findings from a quantitative survey of 500 dyslexic children and young people (aged 13 to 18) and the parents of 490 children with dyslexia (aged 13 to 17). Findings from the survey were supplemented by further, qualitative research with a representative sample of survey respondents, including 10 in-depth interviews with young people and 2 focus groups with parents. More details about the research methodology are available [here](#).

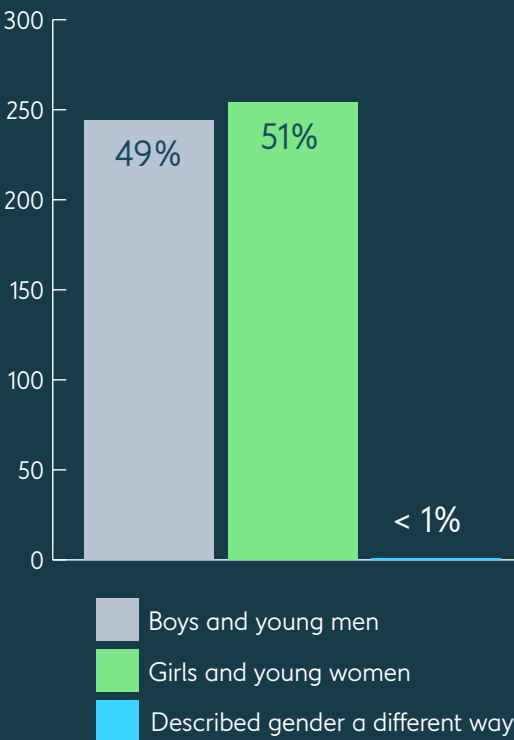
Diagnosis



Ethnicity



Gender



Household income



Living with dyslexia: children and young people’s experiences

“I wish I never had it - life would be much easier rather than struggling every day.”

Young person with dyslexia, aged 15

Despite dyslexia having no direct link to intelligence or poor behaviour, children with dyslexia can face a range of negative outcomes which extend beyond attainment in school, with **9 in 10 young people and their parents judging the young person’s life to be ‘more difficult’ than their peers.**²

Whilst dyslexia impacts children and young people’s lives in many ways, examples shared by children and young people we spoke with most commonly centred on their experiences in schools and colleges, with dyslexia often becoming more noticeable as children get older, schoolwork becomes more demanding and they fall behind - especially when it comes to written work and exams.

- In 2024, figures from the Department for Education showed that 26% of 11 year-olds left primary school in England not meeting the expected reading standard.³
- In the academic year 2023/24, 1 in 5 pupils with dyslexia achieved a Grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSE, compared to over half of pupils with no recorded special educational needs. This is an attainment gap of over 30 percentage points.⁴

Whilst challenges relating to spelling, reading and writing were those most commonly described by children and young people we spoke to, many also referenced difficulties speaking in front of people, remembering things and organising themselves.⁵ This can result in an overall sense of lacking independence and a feeling that young people have to “**work harder**” than their peers “**just to keep up**”.

2 Amongst the children and young people and parents we surveyed, 90% of children and young people and 88% of parents judged children and young people with dyslexia’s lives to be ‘more difficult’ than that of their peers. [The lived experience of dyslexic young people: Research report, August 2025](#)

3 Department for Education (2025) Key stage 2 attainment.

4 British Dyslexia Association (2025) [Mind the gap: GCSE Results and the Dyslexia Divide](#).

5 Almost every young person surveyed described at least one difficulty they experience due to their dyslexia. Challenges with spelling, reading and writing were most commonly reported (77%, 76% and 69% of children reported difficulties in these areas, respectively) but difficulties speaking in front of people (47%), remembering things (45%) and organising themselves (45%) were also often referenced. [The lived experience of dyslexic young people: Research report, August 2025](#)

Whilst some children and young people are able to identify strengths that come with dyslexia (such as perseverance, resilience and creativity), the challenges they face still have a negative impact. Children and young people with dyslexia and/or literacy difficulties report higher levels of poor mental health than their peers and over three quarters of parents with dyslexic children report that their child experiences poor self-esteem, embarrassment and anxiety.⁶

These findings were also borne out in our research – **70% of children and young people surveyed reported that dyslexia has caused them to feel bad about themselves, 78% reported having experienced people assuming that they are not as clever as others due to their dyslexia and 59% reported having been teased or bullied** due to their dyslexia, with many expressing a desire for more understanding and support.

“If teachers and classmates could understand how much effort it takes for me to do something simple like read out loud or write a paragraph, maybe they’d see that I’m not lazy, I’m actually really strong for not giving up.”

Young person with dyslexia, aged 14



Mohammed’s story

Mohammed (aged 15) uses a tablet and group support to manage his dyslexia in secondary school, and enjoys practical, visual learning. However, support only began after Year 7 – leaving him anxious and embarrassed in his earlier years at school. While proud of his creativity, he finds exams stressful, had to drop PE because of writing demands, and often hides his dyslexia due to fear of being judged.

6 All Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs (2019) [The human cost of dyslexia: the emotional and psychological impact of poorly supported dyslexia](#).



Diagnosing dyslexia: challenges for identification and support

“Getting a diagnosis was a herculean task. It was almost like no-one was bothered. My child was managing and doing ‘okay’, so that was ‘good enough’.”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

Early identification of dyslexia is crucial to ensure that children receive support but, in reality, opportunities are often missed. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there is no clear universal pathway for assessment of children with dyslexia and systems for identification and support have been described as a ‘postcode lottery’.⁷ Whilst a standardised test at the end of Year 1 is intended to ‘catch’ those struggling with phonics and literacy, a pressure to ‘teach to the test’ can mask children with dyslexia who are able to hold the knowledge they need for long enough to pass but not able to retain it.

Often, schools simply do not know how many children in their classrooms have dyslexia and more than 80% of children leave school without a diagnosis as this is rarely an option for those who cannot afford to pay.⁸

Our research found that **children and young people with parents of greater financial and educational means are more likely to have received a formal diagnosis than their peers.**

Ethnicity too plays a role, with outdated stereotypes sometimes used to explain learning challenges – and associated behavioural challenges, thus preventing dyslexia identification. This was not seen in our research which focused on talking to those who had already been identified and/or diagnosed but it will be an important focus for future research in order to understand the impact of intersectionality on dyslexia..

“It’s been a very difficult process to get a diagnosis. We have had to pay for the test privately. If we could not have afforded it, our child wouldn’t have had a diagnosis and they would not be getting the support they have now.”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

⁷ Hutchinson, J. (2021) *Identifying pupils with special educational needs and disabilities*, Education Policy Institute and Nuffield Foundation.

⁸ All Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs (2019) *Educational Cost of Dyslexia*.

Of the children and young people surveyed, 90% of those living in households with the highest incomes (£100,000 per annum or more) had a formal diagnosis.

This figure dropped to only 43% amongst those in households with an income of less than £30,000 per annum.

Whilst a formal diagnosis should not be required to ensure children have access to an inclusive learning environment, our research indicates that **a diagnosis can improve both access to support, and the quality of support that children receive.** Of the children and young people surveyed, 73% of those who had a formal diagnosis described the support they receive at school as 'good', compared to only 39% of those who did not.

"I think it's a good thing to have for like other people's point of views, especially when it comes to learning in school, there's more support you can get as well, and it's a good thing to have."

Young person with dyslexia, aged 15

Parents we spoke with also highlighted the role that diagnosis can play in helping children and young people with dyslexia understand themselves and their experiences, and our research indicates that a formal diagnosis can have a positive impact on children and young people's self-esteem, as well as their ability to ask for help at school and feel accepted for who they are in a classroom environment. Whilst **many parents report that support and adjustments still have to be fought for post-diagnosis**, diagnosis remains **"an important part of the puzzle"** and our findings emphasise the importance of identification at the earliest opportunity - giving children and young people with dyslexia the best possible chance of receiving the support they need and deserve as they progress through the education system.

Sam's story

Sam's (aged 14) dyslexia affects processing speed, reading and writing, making English and exams particularly stressful, while maths and science feel more accessible. Although diagnosed in primary school and entitled to extra time, this is rarely applied at secondary school, leaving Sam anxious about GCSEs. They find it hard to ask for help for fear of standing out, recalling past humiliations such as being denied a pen licence. Sam wishes for more practical learning, better teacher understanding of dyslexia, and consistent support so they can succeed.





Struggling at school

Whilst almost two thirds (64%) of children and young people surveyed felt the support they receive for their dyslexia at school is ‘good’, more than a third (35%) described it as only ‘fair’ or ‘poor’. Although children and young people and their parents could identify examples of good practice in schools and colleges (including adjustments to meet individual needs and learning styles), this was not consistently available and children and young people also repeatedly highlighted experiences of inconsistency in support, a lack of knowledge and understanding of dyslexia amongst teachers, and feeling singled out.

“Most teachers didn’t really understand what it’s like to be dyslexic. They just thought I was being lazy or not paying attention, but really, I was trying my best. When I asked for help, [...] it felt like they were more annoyed than supportive.”

Young person with dyslexia, aged 14

For young people from the lowest income households, these negative experiences are likely to be more acute, with children from the lowest income households (less than £30,000 per year) significantly less likely to report receiving high-quality support than children in the highest income households (£100,000+ per year).

Only 39% of children and young people living in the lowest income households (<£30,000 per year) rated the support they received at school as ‘good’ or ‘very good’, compared to 85% of children and young people living in the highest income households (£100,000+ per year).

One negative experience can compound another and young people reported struggling to ask for help because they are worried about the response from their teachers and their peers. In contrast, when there is an adult supporting in the classroom that appears open to providing that support and can do so in a sensitive way, asking for help can feel much easier. Ensuring that adjustments are made without making children and young people feel like they “**stick out**” can also make a big difference.

“[...] someone to come over and just check if I’m okay [...]. I don’t want someone watching over me the whole time... But having someone that doesn’t mind, if I ask, they won’t act like it’s a burden for them to come over, or I don’t mind going over to them.”

Young person, aged 13

Our research has also highlighted exams and assessments as a particular source of difficulty and stress, with 85% of children and young people surveyed reporting that they feel being dyslexic makes exams and tests hard for them. At GCSE level in particular, the time pressure, dense text, and expectation for long written answers all present barriers. Even with access arrangements like extra time, or the use of a word processor (laptop), exams still favour good memory recall, quick and fluent reading and writing, and correct spelling, punctuation and grammar – areas where many dyslexic students struggle. Poor results here can limit dyslexic students’ ability to go on to acquire further qualifications and their education and employment prospects in the future.

“They put the pressure on students with dyslexia to do the same number of GCSEs as other students, which is just not fair. It means they’re spread too thin and their grades go down.”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

Where tools are available which might improve outcomes for children with dyslexia, these are not always utilised. Only 18% of children and young people surveyed reported having access to assistive technology at school and parents expressed frustration about missed opportunities, as well as the rigidity of both teaching styles and a curriculum which they did not feel served or took sufficient account of their children’s needs.

“The technology in this day and age where we have more speaking technology, it is more accessible than ever. Why is it such a problem to get children access to it?”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

“She absolutely detested German with a passion, but because it was on the curriculum as mandatory, I had to fight with the head. But why?”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

Vera’s story



Despite strong English GCSE results, Vera (aged 17) was unable to continue studying English at sixth form, which she believes was due to her dyslexia. At school she felt singled out, embarrassed about using exam arrangements, and rarely supported in lessons. These experiences damaged her confidence and affected her mental health. College has been more positive: support is discreet, exam arrangements are inclusive, and she feels less different. However, the negative impact of her school experience still affects her.

The change children and young people want to see

Despite its prevalence in the classroom and the high cost to individuals and society, children with dyslexia are systematically overlooked in education policy and practice. At a national level, there is no dedicated strategy to ensure that children with dyslexia and the family members and professionals in their lives receive the right support at the right time and current frameworks and learning and development opportunities for teachers and school and college staff do not support them to develop appropriate knowledge of dyslexia.



Despite this, the children, young people and parents we engaged with during our research were optimistic about the ability of the education system to improve and, when asked what needs to change, were able to identify a number of key areas, including:

Greater understanding and awareness of dyslexia in schools and colleges, including through improved teacher training

“The need for more awareness and understanding of dyslexia among educators, employers, and the general public. When people recognise the strengths and challenges associated with dyslexia, it can make a huge difference in creating a supportive environment that allows dyslexic individuals to thrive.”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

Earlier, easier and more effective identification of dyslexic students, including addressing income-related barriers to diagnosis

“I wish I had been diagnosed when I was younger.”

Young person with dyslexia, aged 14

“Make diagnosis a bit easier to get...I think my daughter fell through a lot of gaps and it wasn’t picked up soon enough.”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

Improved support in schools and colleges, with a focus on ensuring consistency

“I’d make it more reliable. It’s just so precarious. [...] If she gets great teaching, she flies and she does really, really well. And if she doesn’t, then she really, really struggles. [Nothing can guarantee that] the particular teacher she gets is going to be interested in dyslexia or teaching to a variety of different learning styles. [...]”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

The development of alternative ways to learn, including better access to technology, a more flexible curriculum and inclusive assessment practices

“I would love to be able to speak rather than write in all situations. AI is helping me to do this more.”

Young person with dyslexia, aged 17

“In a couple of the sciences, instead of just learning about them and writing it down and drawing diagrams, actually doing it so I can see it and see how it works.”

Young person with dyslexia, aged 13

“The one thing that I’ve achieved in this so far is I’ve got him to not have to do his French homework.... But he still has to sit through the lessons, he still has to sit through the exams. My argument is why don’t you give him extra English, instead of him just sitting there?”

Parent of a child with dyslexia

Recommendations

To build a more inclusive education system where children and young people with dyslexia are supported, understood and given the chance to succeed, the Department for Education must:



Make children with dyslexia a priority

To ensure children and young people with dyslexia become a priority and are no longer overlooked, the Department for Education must develop a **National Dyslexia Strategy**, appoint a **policy lead for dyslexia** and improve annual data collection and reporting on children with dyslexia in schools.



Ensure early identification and equity in access to support

To ensure early and consistent identification of children with dyslexia and end inequalities in access to support, the Department for Education must resource and support the development of a **universal pathway for assessment**, develop a **simple, in-classroom screening tool** and review the use of the **Year 1 Phonics Check** to ensure it is fit-for-purpose.



Create 'dyslexia-friendly' classrooms

To ensure all classrooms are 'dyslexia-friendly' learning environments and school staff are supported and resourced to support children with dyslexia, the Department for Education must establish a **national standard of SEN support** on a statutory footing and set out clear expectations for initial and ongoing CPD training for teachers and school staff in relation to dyslexia.



Widen the scope of the curriculum and assessment

To ensure that the national curriculum meets the needs of all learners, the Department for Education must introduce explicit **teaching of assistive technology** to help reading and spelling from Key Stage 2, provide **vocational and functional pathways alongside GCSEs** and ensure GCSE assessment techniques better reflect the skills of all learners, including **removal of SPaG marks** in exams not testing English language skills, or enable learners to use assistive technology to gain these marks.





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