

Manx Dyslexia Association Chairmans's Report 2025

I would like to start my report this year by welcoming Lynne Speller to the committee and to congratulate her on her Level 5 BDA qualification as a specialist dyslexia teacher. I know she is keen to begin teaching individual pupils as well as her work as a class teacher at Braddan School.

Most of our work this year has been with the Education Department with their new literacy documents. Chrissie Watson and I have reviewed and supported Helen Newbery on these. I am pleased to say that the Parent Document has now been approved and the two school ones are out for review (Primary and Secondary). I look forward to the MDA being able to support the Department by informing parents about literacy developments and the important role they play.

There have been other meetings with the Education Department's Head of Psychology, Jonny Fee, to look at the Scottish Literacy Document on identifying and supporting dyslexic students. This was a detailed document emphasising the need for collaboration (teachers, parents, pupils and other professionals) and staged intervention. These have been highlighted in the new IOM literacy documents.

We had further involvement with the Education Department by attending a demonstration of an online FFT assessment programme. It was very interesting especially as an assessment tool in Primary schools. It was planned that this would be trialled by some schools in the Autumn, use of it being dependent on funding.

I am attaching a document we have produced this year as a written submission to a Government Select Committee which was formed as a response to a second petition put forward by Julia Bell on Tynwald Day. We were invited to submit this and attend an Oral Hearing which decided not to do. Various other groups and individuals were involved. The Select Committee were due to publish their report by the end of October but it is still not yet available.

On the technology front, artificial intelligence (AI) is the emerging trend. Whilst we have not managed to make progress in this area both the Department and businesses are making use of it.

Looking forward to the coming year, I am delighted to say we have two requests for Barrington Stoke books. Hopefully more schools will take up our offer to buy them as they are an excellent resource for struggling readers.

Our main purpose is to inform and support parents about literacy issues. I am hoping that we can do this in schools over the coming year. It would be useful for us to meet with parents of children before they start school to help them to understand the important role they play. A leaflet might be worth us producing. Lynne has also suggested that we improve our profile by attending more public events. Our Facebook Page and Helpline continue to help and inform parents.

Sadly, I am ending my report by announcing that my co-chair Chrissie Watson is stepping down from the MDA. She has provided excellent knowledge and support and will be sorely missed. I would like to thank her for all the time she has given the MDA and wish her well as she copes with new challenges in her life.

Sue Rutter

6th January 2026

Manx Dyslexia Association

Tynwald Dyslexia Committee – submission January 2025

1. Introduction

The Manx Dyslexia Association (MDA) was originally set up by a group of concerned parents and was registered as a Charity in 1997. One of the aims of the MDA is to ensure that each dyslexic individual has the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential. The MDA and has done a great deal over the years to increase awareness and understanding of specific learning differences on the Island.

The MDA seeks to ensure Dyslexia is recognised as a condition which can be helped considerably by appropriate teaching methods.

We work with parents of dyslexic children, adults who are dyslexic and teachers.

Our website provides information and details of events as well as answering frequently asked questions about dyslexia. Parents can contact the committee with their concerns via the website.

We also have an official Facebook Page on which we post relevant articles and promote events.

In conclusion, we view ourselves as a support group, rather than a pressure group.

2. How the MDA has supported parents

In the early days of the MDA drop-in sessions for parents were held on a regular basis. Committee members were available to chat and advise. The committee consisted of teachers with dyslexia knowledge and parents of dyslexic children.

As time went on the MDA organised 'Parent Aid' sessions which were larger events and included activities, book displays and demonstrations of equipment and ideas to support parents and children.

Parents were encouraged to use the Island's libraries both as a source of information and for dyslexia friendly books for children. Barrington Stoke books, Listening Books, Audible and Egon Publishers all came to the Island to an event at the Henry Bloom Noble Library.

Parents email regularly, or message on Facebook, with questions and requests for advice. These are always followed up by email, phone calls and / or a meeting.

Workshops have been held at various venues around the Island (St Johns, Kewaigue, Arbory, Ashley Hill and Sulby schools and Ramsey Town Library) which have included such topics as; mind-mapping, technology, book displays, maths advice as well as the giving parents the chance to discuss their concerns and ask questions.

The MDA also became involved with the ManxLitFest, sponsoring authors with a dyslexia connection. These included among others, Gez Walsh, Joe Beech and Sally Gardener. School visits were included and involved MDA members.

3. MDA and the Department of Education, Sport and Culture ("DESC")

The MDA has always tried to work with the DESC from the early days. Conferences were organised for all professionals and parents from as early as 2001.

Speakers have included Neil Mackay, Steve Chinn and Anne Henderson all who came more than once. Dr Gavin Reed visited the Island and held two sessions at Ballakermeen School and Dr Jenny Guise came to do some private assessments and held a seminar for Sencos and IOM college staff. All these events were free of charge as funded by the MDA. In total in the 10 years from 2009 to 2019 the MDA spent £21,813 on various events/ activities to promote dyslexia on the Island (see Appendix 1).

Numbers attending have dwindled over the years due to schools not having the resources to release staff to attend such events, coupled with a general lack of interest by DESC to support our initiatives.

In 2011 Dr Helen Newbery became interested in the MDA and she has worked hard in supporting the events we have organised as well as keeping us updated with useful technology for children. She has attended workshops to demonstrate some of this to parents and children.

The MDA supported the DESC in regular 'Talk Through' sessions held around schools around the Island for two years. These proved very successful. After the visit of Sir Jackie Stewart, who himself is very dyslexic, a Young Ambassadors group was set up on his recommendation.

More recently, when Dr Allinson was Minister for Education, he was very interested in the work we were doing and met with us to encourage our involvement in the questionnaires being drafted for parents and teachers on the topic of Literacy for All. Two questionnaires were eventually released, one for completion by teachers and professionals and one for completion by parents. The MDA were involved with this process, working closely with Dr Helen Newbery.

It was good to be included and to have our opinions respected. The findings from the Questionnaire were finally published on the Hub in 2022. As a result, recommendations were made and a Literacy for All document was produced supported by the Education Endowment Foundation. Dr Helen Newbery. The MDA were mentioned in the recommendations document prior to this.

4. Other initiatives by the MDA

In 2021 our new website was set up and there were the usual requests for assessments not only re students but also from adults in the workplace.

We have been more active on Facebook sharing not only resources but also articles of interest such as the Jay Blades programme, audio book, Nessy, as well as oral language and Dyslexia

The MDA were asked for help from the Police Department and met with them and gave advice and undertook dyslexia awareness training to new recruits We have also been invited by a number of private companies to do presentations on Dyslexia Awareness in the Workplace which were very well received.

The MDA also supported a group of students from St Ninians in the Junior Achievement Programme who had developed an App to support those with literacy difficulties. They went on to win this award and subsequently won the European Junior Achievement Innovation Company of the Year award.

It has become clearer over the years that technology is the way forward in supporting those with dyslexia and in communicating information.

5. MDA experience of dyslexia provisions on the Island

From our involvement, over the years, with pupils with learning differences, their parents and the DESC we would like to make the following observations, split between primary and secondary schoolchildren:-

a. Primary schools

There appears to be an inconsistent approach to how learning differences are identified and dealt with from school to school. How dyslexic pupils are treated comes down to the individual schools and much depends on the interest and expertise of the Senco at that school. In our experience, not all Senco's possess the expertise to be able to structure a pathway for dyslexic learning

We often have parents telling us that they are being informed by teachers that they are unable to undertake assessments for Dyslexia. Being told this is compounding parents' anxieties for their child. All schools have provisions for assessing for

learning difficulties, so we simply do not understand why some schools are still reluctant to do this

The labelling of a child with dyslexia can cause more problems and make parents more anxious

There is insufficient training of ALL classroom teachers to recognise signs of learning differences

Senco's are not always as well trained as they could be to put provisions in place. Additionally, Senco's don't appear to have sufficient time scheduled to devote to the duties of a Senco

b. Secondary schools

Some staff seem to have little awareness of pupils who are struggling. All staff should be aware of the early signs that a pupil is not performing

Classroom teachers need to be employing practices that benefit the whole class, including multisensory techniques

We often receive reports from concerned parents about late identification of learning differences, sometimes at GCSE stage which is the too late to be of benefit to the pupil

From our experience, we believe that more work needs to be focused on the basics of Maths in the first 2 years of Secondary school. This is partly caused by the knock-on effect of ineffective teaching of Maths at some primary schools

6. Personal experiences

We receive the majority of queries from parents of children at the later stages of Primary (years 5 and 6) and Secondary from years 8 upwards. We tend to have more queries from parents of primary school children.

Once we have talked to the parents and established what the problem is, then we give them advice and hopefully the confidence to support their child and go back into school to ask the right questions. We firmly believe that the first point of contact should be the classroom teacher, followed by the Senco.

However, there are still occasions that parents report back to us that they have got nowhere with the school and are frustrated, This is more the case with Secondary Schools.

Over the years we have tried hard to establish closer links with schools, with varying degrees of success. Schools, especially secondary schools, seem wary of letting us in.

We have offered to do short presentations on the topic of Dyslexia Awareness during school Assemblies, but these have mainly been turned down.

In the past the DESC has also not been supportive of initiatives from the MDA.

7. Our opinions

More needs to be done to De-Mystify Learning Differences for both teachers and parents.

Specific dyslexia training needs to be given to each school on the Island, not just the Senco's, so that all classroom teachers are aware of the signs to look out for to aid early intervention

We believe that there should be a common training program for all Senco's to attend so that they are fully aware of what policies the DESC has in place throughout all schools on the Island.

Also, there should be regular monitoring of all schools to ensure that policies are being adhered to. This should be done by a dedicated team from within the DESC to ensure continuity and enforcement.

More could be done by schools to De-Mystify Learning Differences for parents. This could take the form of newsletters or Year Group presentations, but it is an initiative that should be led by schools.

8. In conclusion

Early identification of literacy difficulties should be the focus of the DESC Policies going forward. This is the period when interventions have the greatest impact.

This will ensure that all children with learning difficulties are identified and have access to the relevant resources and support from their school, that they deserve.

Manx Dyslexia Association
Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dyspraxia and Dysgraphia
Call for Evidence by the Select Committee of Tynwald

1. Introduction

Dyslexia is a merely a label indicating that certain people, both children and adults, learn in a way that is considered different from the norm. As such dyslexics require teaching support to be in a form that addresses the difference. Such support should be given in appropriate form both by teachers and parents.

The extent of the problem is illustrated by the fact that in the Isle of Man in 2018 25% of children and young people were staged on the Special Educational Needs Register in schools with their primary area of need identified as a specific learning difficulty (including dyslexia).

The Manx Dyslexia Association (MDA) was originally set up by a group of concerned parents and was registered as a Charity in 1997. One of the aims of the MDA is to ensure that each dyslexic individual has the opportunity to fulfil his or her potential. The MDA has done a great deal over the years to increase awareness and understanding of specific learning differences and difficulties on the Island.

The MDA is administered by a committee of 5. The Chair is a qualified teacher with a post graduate diploma in specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) and is also an associate member of the British Dyslexia Association. A second committee member is also a qualified teacher with a post graduate certificate in specific learning difficulties, a training certificate of competence in educational testing as well as a dyslexia diploma. The three other members all have first hand experience of dealing with dyslexia in their respective families.

We work with parents of dyslexic children, adults who are dyslexic as well as teachers and employers. We regard ourselves as a support group rather than a pressure group.

Our website provides information and details of events as well as acting as a portal for answering frequently asked questions about dyslexia. Anyone can contact the MDA with their concerns via the website.

We also have an official Facebook Page on which we post relevant articles and promote events.

2. MDA experience of dyslexia provision on the Island

The MDA's experience of the Island addressing all forms of literacy and learning difficulties (including dyslexia) is that it is largely inadequate and varies hugely from school to school.

It is also the case that parents are aware of these inadequacies in their dealings with the schools as a result of which so many contact the MDA for advice and support.

From our involvement with pupils with learning differences, their parents and the DESC we would like to make the following observations regarding provision in primary and secondary schools :-

a. Primary schools

There appears to be an inconsistent approach to how learning differences are identified and dealt with from school to school. How dyslexic pupils are treated comes down to the individual schools and much depends on the interest and expertise of the Special educational needs coordinators (Sencos) at that school. In our experience, not all Sencos possess the expertise to be able to structure a pathway for dyslexic learning.

We often have parents telling us that they are being informed by teachers that they are unable to undertake assessments for dyslexia. Being told this compounds a parent's anxieties for their child. All schools have provisions for assessing for learning difficulties, so we simply do not understand why some schools are still reluctant to do this.

The mere labelling of a child with dyslexia can cause more problems and make parents more anxious without adequate explanation and the ability of the teacher to communicate lessons appropriately to that child.

There is insufficient training of ALL classroom teachers to recognise signs of learning differences.

Sencos are not always as well trained as they could be to put provisions in place. Additionally, Sencos do not appear to have sufficient time scheduled to devote to the duties of a Senco.

b. Secondary schools

There appears to be a greater lack of awareness of learning differences amongst staff in secondary schools. This may be because secondary teachers teach specific subjects and a pupil will therefore have 5 or 6 different teachers, all of whom need to be aware of the child's learning differences.

Some staff seem to have little awareness of pupils who are struggling. All staff should be aware of the early signs that a pupil is not performing.

Classroom teachers need to be employing practices that benefit the whole class, including multisensory techniques.

We often receive reports from concerned parents about late identification of learning differences, sometimes only at GCSE stage which is too late to be of benefit to the pupil.

Whilst dyslexic issues relate mainly to language, the MDA has noticed problem areas in learning difficulties related to numbers (dyscalculia). This is often because of working memory issues plus the language of maths. Repetition and reinforcement are needed to build confidence in maths, not only in Primary school but in the first two years at secondary school.

3. Sources of information collected by the MDA over the years

The MDA has held drop-in sessions for parents on a regular basis at which committee members were available to chat and advise.

The MDA also organised 'Parent Aid' sessions which were larger events and included activities, book displays and demonstrations of equipment and ideas to support parents and children.

Parents were encouraged to use the Island's libraries both as a source of information and for dyslexia friendly books for children. Barrington Stoke books, Listening Books, Audible and Egon Publishers all came to the Island to an event organised by the MDA at the Henry Bloom Noble Library.

On a regular basis parents email or message on Facebook with questions and requests for advice. These are always followed up by email, phone calls and / or a meeting. Of late we have been more active on Facebook sharing not only resources but also articles of interest such as the Jay Blades programme, audio books and the learning App, Nessy.

Workshops have been held at various venues around the Island (St Johns, Kewagie, Arbory, Ashley Hill and Sulby schools and Ramsey Town Library) which have included such topics as; mind-mapping, technology, book displays, maths advice as well as the giving parents the chance to discuss their concerns and ask questions.

The MDA also became involved with the Manx LitFest, sponsoring authors with a dyslexia connection. These included among others, Gez Walsh, Joe Beech and Sally Gardener. School visits were included and involved MDA members.

The MDA were asked for help from the Police Department and met with them, gave advice and undertook dyslexia awareness training to new recruits. We have also been invited by a number of private companies to do presentations on Dyslexia Awareness in the Workplace which were very well received.

The MDA also supported a group of students from St Ninians in the Junior Achievement Programme who had developed an App to support those with literacy difficulties. They went on to win this award and subsequently won the European Junior Achievement Innovation company of the Year award.

Meetings have been held with Digital Isle of Man to discuss supporting AI training for dyslexic adults in the work force.

It has become clearer over the years that technology is the way forward in supporting those with dyslexia and in communicating information.

4. MDA and the Department of Education, Sport and Culture ("DESC")

The MDA has always tried to work with the DESC from the early days. Conferences were organised for all professionals and parents from as early as 2001.

Speakers have included Neil Mackay, Steve Chinn and Anne Henderson all who came more than once. Dr Gavin Reed visited the Island and held two sessions at Ballakermeen School and

Dr Jenny Guise came to do some private assessments and held a seminar for Sencos and IOM college staff. All these events were free of charge and funded by the MDA. Overall the MDA has spent almost £25,000 on various events / activities / facilities to promote and aid the understanding of dyslexia on the Island including the provision of specialist books to schools.

Following Neil Mackay's visits to the Island some schools signed up for the Dyslexia Aware Quality Mark (DAQM). This was a joint initiative with the DESC, with the MDA making a £500 contribution to the costs of any school wishing to obtain this kite mark.

However, participation by teachers has dwindled over recent years due to schools not having the resources to release staff to attend such events, coupled with a general lack of interest by the DESC to support our initiatives.

The one exception is Dr Helen Newbery who since 2011 has consistently supported the events we have organised, kept us updated re useful technology for children and has also attended workshops to demonstrate some of this to parents and children.

The MDA supported the DESC in regular 'Talk Through' sessions held around schools around the Island for two years. These proved very successful. After the visit of Sir Jackie Stewart, who himself is very dyslexic, a Young Ambassadors group was set up on his recommendation.

The MDA funded the purchase by the DESC of Claro reading pens which read out the written word when drawn across a line of text.

More recently, when Dr Allinson was Minister for Education, he was very interested in the work we were doing and met with us to encourage our involvement in the questionnaires being drafted for parents and teachers on the topic of Literacy for All. Two questionnaires were eventually released, one for completion by teachers and professionals and one for completion by parents. The MDA were involved with this process, working closely with Dr Helen Newbery.

The findings from the Questionnaire were finally published in 2022. As a result, recommendations were made and a Literacy for All document was produced supported by the Education Endowment Foundation.

5. Personal experiences

Several of our committee members with dyslexic children have encountered the same problems as those brought to us by the parents who have contacted us for help and guidance.

We receive the majority of queries from parents of children at the later stages of primary (years 5 and 6) and secondary from years 8 upwards. In the past 4 years 45% of queries have been from parents of secondary students, 34% primary students and 21% from adults.

Once we have talked to the parents and established what the problem is, then we give them advice and hopefully the confidence to support their child and go back into school to ask the right questions. We firmly believe that the first point of contact should be the classroom teacher, followed by the Senco.

However, there are still occasions when many parents report back to us that they have got nowhere with the school and are frustrated, This is more the case with Secondary Schools.

Over the years we have tried hard to establish closer links with schools, with varying degrees of success. Schools, especially secondary schools, seem wary of letting us in. We have offered to do short presentations on the topic of Dyslexia Awareness during school Assemblies, but these have mainly been turned down.

In the past and in general the DESC has not been supportive of initiatives from the MDA.

6. Our opinions

The Literacy for All report prepared by Dr Newbery in 2022 along with its Recommendation identifies the problems and recommends a framework for dealing with them. The MDA wholeheartedly supports this.

These recommendations MUST be implemented, not simply passed up the chain of command and then ignored.

7. Where changes need to be made

The Isle of Man is a relatively small community and as such is ideally placed to implement a coordinated island wide methodology for teaching those with the learning difficulties encompassed by the label 'dyslexia'

More needs to be done for both teachers and parents to de-mystify learning differences.

Specific dyslexia training needs to be given to each school on the Island, not just the Sencos, so that all classroom teachers are aware of the signs to look out for in order to aid early intervention.

We believe that there should be a common training program for all Sencos to attend so that they are fully aware of what policies the DESC has in place throughout all schools on the Island.

There appears to be a reluctance for schools to undertake assessments of children in their early years at school resulting in dyslexic children not being identified. Early intervention is key in addressing literacy issues.

Most importantly, there should be regular monitoring of all schools to ensure that policies are being adhered to. This should be done by a dedicated team from within the DESC to ensure continuity and enforcement.

8. In conclusion

Early identification of literacy difficulties should be the focus of the DESC Policies going forward. This is the period when interventions have the greatest impact.

This will ensure that all children with learning difficulties are identified and have access to the relevant resources and support from their school, that they deserve.

21 January 2025