

# STATES OF JERSEY

## Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel Student Suspensions Review Sub Panel

**FRIDAY, 23rd OCTOBER 2009**

**Panel:**

Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier (Chairman)

Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade

Connétable G.F. Butcher of St. John

**Witnesses:**

Ms. R. Smith (Jersey Dyslexia Association)

**In Attendance:**

Ms. S. Power (Scrutiny Officer)

Ms. G. Bunting (Adviser)

Professor P. Munn (Professor of Curriculum Research at the University of Edinburgh, Adviser)

**Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier (Chairman):**

Thank you for coming, Ruth. Just to start this session, I do have to draw your attention to the statement on your desk. For the record I will ask the panel to introduce themselves. Then I would ask for you to introduce yourself. I am Deputy Trevor Pitman. I am Chairman of the sub-panel. To my right we have ...

**Connétable G.F. Butcher of St. John:**

Graeme Butcher, Constable of St. John.

**Ms. S. Power:**

Sam Power, Scrutiny Officer.

**Professor P. Munn (Professor of Curriculum Research at University of Edinburgh, Adviser):**

I am Pamela Munn. I am a professor of curriculum research at the University of Edinburgh. I am here as an adviser to the panel.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

On my left ...

**Ms. J. Bunting (Adviser):**

Gillian Bunting, ex-teacher, adviser.

**Deputy M. Tadier of St. Brelade:**

Deputy Montfort Tadier of St. Brelade.

**Ms. R. Smith (Jersey Dyslexia Association):**

Ruth Smith, Learning Support Teacher. Would it be helpful if I gave you some of my background to how I became a specialist in dyslexia? I originally began work as a professional youth worker and realised that there were some children who were having huge difficulties at school who performed really well in a youth work setting, whether they were marvellous cooks, great artists or theatricals. I was also at the time teaching part-time at St. Helier Boys, which was a secondary school. I came across a boy who was obviously really bright and was failing on the literacy front. I have had his permission to talk about him. He has since become the Principal Met Officer, Jersey. He has a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy). No thanks to me. I used to keep him in every lunchtime to help him. I did not know anything about dyslexia at that point. I have since worked at a unit for school suspensions, which was the precursor to what was then Les Chenes. It was called the Secondary Tutorial Unit. I did 3 and a half years there. I realised again that there was this mismatch between obviously articulate, bright-ish children and could not quite figure it out how the literacy performance seemed to be so at a mismatch with their obvious intelligence when they were speaking or doing things. Then from there I went to Victoria College and worked as far as A Level. Again I was given the bottom set, because I had done psychology at university and they thought I could deal with them. That was really where I began to research about dyslexia, because there was again this mismatch between really bright or averagely bright boys and what they were producing on paper and indeed how they were reading. I was also friendly with certain teachers there who were obviously dyslexic. But my main experience was at Grainville Secondary School where I did nearly 17 years as a learning support teacher both in the classroom as a teacher with another teacher - I will say something about that in a minute - and also as a specialist as I become more knowledgeable about specific learning difficulties: hearing impaired, visually impaired, but mainly dyslexia. I was also Head of Upper School, so I had quite a lot to do with discipline - I did that for 12 years - and suspensions, both temporary and longer ones. I have since been at Highlands F.E. (Further Education) College, just for a year, setting up their learning support system. That was a temporary contract for one year. I am now at a prep school and work with 7, 8, 9 and 10 year-olds. I also am Chairperson of the Jersey Dyslexia Association. As such I run a helpline; my number is in the book. I probably get 12 to 15 phone calls a week from either concerned parents or adults in the workplace who are worried about an exam coming up or their performance at work. I teach privately as well, anybody from the age of 7 to 57. I have just been working with an architect who wanted to improve. So, I have told you all that because I kind of got into dyslexia in a round about way really. I never intended to do it really, but it just intrigued me so much.

I think it is helpful to understand the neurology of dyslexia, because then you can understand why teachers miss it. Forgive me if you know about it already and please stop me if you think I am going off the point. I have done quite a lot of study. I am up to Masters Level. I did that 3 years ago, on dyslexia, distance learning of course, just to give myself some professional credence really, because I had been doing the job for 25 years, but I had not actually got a professional qualification. Basically there is now known to be a brain difference in the left hemisphere of the brain, as shown by M.R.I. (magnetic resonance imaging) scans. Professor John Stein, at Oxford - who I am a big fan of - has very convincing arguments for it being a magnocellular difference. So there is a difference in the brain cells in the language centre, because dyslexia is a language processing difficulty. A lot of people think it just a reading and writing problem. That is the case, but it is also much wider than that. It can affect memory, it can affect auditory discrimination - people are not hearing sounds, they cannot tell the difference between sounds - it certainly affects direction, left/right orientation, above, below, in front, behind, lots of things that we take for granted that children and adults know about, they can quite often be confused by that. Short term working memory can be quite poor. So they have to put in place lots of strategies to organise themselves, otherwise they become very disorganised. So there is a cellular difference on the left brain. There is also a theory that there are several different types of dyslexia. I actually subscribe to that. At the present time I am working with 38 different children and I have 2 lots of identical twins. So genetically absolutely ... I still get them mixed up name-wise, I have to call them by a name and hope it is the right one, because they look no different, so you would assume that their genetic make-up was

absolutely the same. But, in fact, they are slightly different. They are both dyslexic, but I have to treat them differently. So, there is a cellular difference make-up wise and they now think the synapses between the cells are possibly crossed. That would explain why it is mainly a perceptual problem. It is how people see things. It might be, not only back to front, so they might see “was” as “saw” or “saw” for “was”, they can also invert it as well. So they might write a “u” and swear blind it is an “n”, because that is the way their brain perceives it. That fits with the magnocellular theory, because that is where things are in your brain. The good news is the right hemisphere, instead of being smaller than the left as it is in a non-dyslexic brain, is the same size or even slightly larger in a dyslexic brain. The right hemisphere is your hands on creative, artistic, see the big picture, problem solving side. So if you are in a group and you want really good solutions to problems always go with at least 2 dyslexic people, because they can see things that other people who think logically, sequentially, left brain, just do not see. They also seem to have incredible talents in that direction. The architect I have just been working with is very, very, very good. I put it to him the other day that he perhaps would not be so good if he did not have that type of brain. So, I would like to propose that dyslexia is a brain difference rather than a disability. It becomes a disability if children are not picked up as dyslexic; if they are just treated the same as everyone else. I mean, by and large most children will learn by the traditional or non-traditional teaching methods. They want to learn, they pick it up. Some children will learn to read in spite of poor teaching or with no teaching at all. One of my daughters was reading by the time she was 3. I did not do anything about teaching her to read, she just picked it up from the shape of the words. The other one was 7 and a half before she was even interested. Neither of them have any specific learning difficulties. I am just saying; for the most part what we do in schools really works. But for dyslexic children or children with specific learning difficulties ... I should say also that dyslexia is also very rarely just on its own. It is called co-morbidity. It exists with other conditions. You may have children who are also dyspraxic (developmental co-ordination disorder), so they are clumsy, either in a gross motor way: riding a bike, kicking a ball, catching a ball or in a fine motor way, so their handwriting is very poor, they cannot tie shoelaces or do fine motor things.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Can I come in here, Ruth?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Sure.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

You have already told me a lot that I did not already know, so one of the questions that we have been putting to the Minister and his director, and indeed the union representatives, clearly what you are seeming to suggest is a lot of the problems have come because teachers are not aware to pick up these difficulties.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I was going to say, in training ... I was fully trained. I think I did an hour on specific learning difficulties, but that was a long time ago. So now when I have had a teacher training student, I always say to their tutor: “What training do they get in specific learning difficulties?” You have to bear in mind that 1 in 10 people have got some kind of difficulty in this way. It is on the continuum, so they could be mildly dyslexic right through to very, very, severely dyslexic and anywhere in between and is absolutely nothing to do with intelligence. You can have moderate learning difficulties right through to very, very bright people. So, on the training front it is very patchy. There are some universities who really do a good job in special needs learning difficulties. Others, they say to me: “Oh, yes they get quite a lot” and when you ask them it is 2 hours out of their course, which ...

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

This is while teachers are undertaking their training?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes, while they are undertaking their training. So, you assume that teachers will know about specific learning difficulties and the reality is they do not; unless they have had a special interest. I mean, I just was interested so I took it upon myself to train myself up and then I did my professional qualification. The schools that you work in will send people away on conferences and courses, but it is very much up to the individual.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

So there is no consistency.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

There is no consistency in my view. This is my personal view. It will be interesting how the new literacy thrust will impact because the teaching of reading has come through a lot of different fashions, if you like, but there is no doubt at all that they have to be taught synthetic phonics. Synthetic phonics are where you - I thought it meant plastic ones, but it is nothing to do with that - blend sounds together. All schools are now teaching in that way in Jersey. However, there will be one or 2 children who will not pick up enough by that. That is because dyslexic children need a lot of reinforcement and revisiting, because of the nature of their brain difference. You cannot just do something once or twice, as you can with some children and they will get it, they will not forget it, they will just keep hold of it and they will use it. With some children, you can teach it really well, they have got it that day and then the next day they have not got it, so you have got to find another way. So I will perhaps teach some of the children I work with 10 times on one aspect of their learning. You know, you have to be very inventive and keep it interesting and you have to use every sense going. So, you know, I have been doing all sorts of daft things, but it is anything to get it in there. So, 10 years ago there were lots of teachers who were encouraged to take on professional training. They are all kind of my age group. I can tell you who they are, because we all went through it at the same time. There needs to be, in my opinion, another thrust as to awareness raising and training. Both for teachers, so there are specialist teachers and teaching assistants. There has been a big move to put in teaching assistants in classrooms, which is good - I am not decrying teaching assistants at all - but often they are women wanting to return to work. They have been bank workers, they have been dental hygienists, they are all sorts of people, they come in, they are not given a huge amount of training, so they are just working from their commonsense point of view and certainly in secondary schools - and I witness this over and over and over - children in secondary school who have not learnt to read and write properly have an over reliance on their helper, as they see it. As a learning support teacher I started off in classrooms with other teachers, but I got terribly frustrated, because you cannot teach a pupil the basics of reading and spelling while they are in the middle of a geography class, a history class or a science class. You can access the curriculum for them by maybe changing it so it is more accessible or you can help them understand by putting it in a different way, but you certainly cannot do the nitty-gritty in the middle of a load of other children.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Without putting words into your mouth, is it fair to say you are describing a failing system really?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I would rather call it an inconsistent system.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Okay.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

There are some primary schools that are exceptionally good and willing to help and try lots of things. Because of my role as dyslexia chairperson, I phone people back when they phone me and then I quite often liaise with the schools. I will see the child and the parent, because you cannot really do it over the phone, do an assessment as part of my charity work for the Dyslexia Association and then I make suggestions to parents as to how they can help at home, because that is what lots of parents want to know. Because if you are just doing something for 15, 20 minutes at school, it is rather like me going on a diet every Wednesday afternoon. It does not do it. You have got to have the follow up, 3, 4, 5 times a week at home, just little and often, so parents have got to get on board and they want to know the best ways of helping. Quite often at home that is playing different literacy games with them and doing different ... small things, like card games, where the child does not realise they are reading and the whole family can play, so it is very inclusive.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Is there is enough being done to engage those parents to follow up the work that you are talking about?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I cannot comment on that, Trevor, because I am not in the schools. Certainly when I was at Grainville I held lots of curriculum evenings, I did it on how to help with homework, how to help with reading and how to help with spelling. The take up was very good. Parents, even though they are very busy, want to help. They get very worried when their child does not seem to be making the progress. So, teaching assistants are often given children to work with on a one-to-one. Yes, sometimes they are guided very well by a specialist teacher, but sometimes they are just asked: "Can you hear these children read" or: "Can you do some more phonic work?" In my experience, they are very willing to take up what you ask them to do and they are also very hungry for training in the right kind of way. So, you cannot just take anybody off the street and expect them to work with the most severe cases, which is sometimes the case in schools.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

Can I ask you, with the experience that you have - an opinion I think I am looking for as much as anything - do you think schools put enough emphasis on specialist teachers to look at things such as dyslexia?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

There has been a swing away ... I can give you an example, when I went to Grainville in 1986 there were 4 specialist teachers and we all had our areas of expertise. One person was numeracy and she was really fantastic at advising. I was into spelling and how people learn, study support and study skills. Somebody else was into reading. The Head of Department had a very good overview. We ran a Communications Disorders Unit and Hearing Impaired Unit. There were 4 full time teachers. Gradually people left to do other things. As far as I know now, they only have one teacher who was not particularly trained. I am not picking on that secondary school, because it is a good school in lots of respects. But because of finance, people somehow think it is a cheaper option to use lots more teaching assistants than specialists. It is a bit like going to your G.P. (General Practitioner) when you have a heart complaint. You really need to get to the consultant. It is that kind of analogy. It is not a cheaper option, because these children are sometimes leaving with very poor literacy skills. I mean, what they do in school might merit many and varied responses... I mean, they might become very withdrawn and school-phobic or they might start acting up. They get very frustrated; they get very angry, because they cannot read. Everybody else seems to be able to do it. They are coming in day in day out facing huge mountains and their needs are not being met for some children. They often will get into trouble with the law. They often end up in prisons. I know the U.K. (United Kingdom) prison population is a very high percentage of dyslexics. I do not know about La Moye, but as a dyslexia committee person I am going in periodically.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

Obviously the subject we are looking at at the moment is school suspension, in your experience, would you say that things like dyslexia and other related problems are diagnosed after issues have arisen, in term of behavioural issues?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes, that can be the case. It can absolutely be the case, that perhaps they are not even diagnosed at all, because they are so camouflaged by acting out angry behaviour. I was a class teacher, you know, for 17 years at Grainville and I also did one to one, so I had a view from both sides. Even with all my experience and knowledge of specific learning difficulties it was still very hard to deal with children in a class situation who had completely turned off. As I said on the radio this morning, it is to do with not only self-esteem, which is terribly, terribly important, but I know it is to do with self-belief. If they do believe they can do it, they will come back for more and they will work really hard, because a dyslexic child has to work 10 times harder than the next person. Their reading speed will be slower, the words might jump around, they might have to overcome lots of unseen difficulties but if they believe they can do it and if the culture around them supports that, then they will keep coming back for more. Children who have lost that self-belief, because of what has happened to them early on, they have failed, failed, failed, failed, everybody else seems to be getting it, they do not and I just wonder why they turn up for school sometimes.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Can we just come in there? You talked about the acting up. What, in a nutshell, can schools do then to try to prevent children with dyslexia from that acting up that hides the real issues?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Absolutely pick up from the age of 7. Some children, brain-wise, especially boys, because boys' brains are not ready for certain types of learning until they are 7. I mean in Holland and Denmark and places they are not going to formal school until that age. We have just had a big report from England about that, have we not, where it is 6 now they are saying? But I know that to be a fact, especially if they are later on in the academic year. It does not seem to affect girls as much as boys. There are definite biological and physiological differences in the brain between boys and girls. I would say 7 is a good age where if things persist ... like lots of children reverse letters, loads of children reverse letters, that is simply a memory and a recognition problem. Not a problem, it is just because they are little and they do not remember which way round a "b" and a "d" and a "p" goes. But if it persists, despite good teaching and lots of practice, then you have to start looking. There are lots of indicators for dyslexia, it is not just one thing, it is not just cannot learn the alphabet, there are loads of other things like they cannot remember the sequence of the days of the week or the months of the year. That is why they cannot remember the alphabet; they cannot remember the order of instructions that you give them. So there are some very minor adjustments that teachers in classrooms can make that will help everybody. If everybody was taught in a dyslexic friendly way, it would help absolutely everybody, because it is very good teaching.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

So there are things that can be done that have not got huge funding implications then from what you are saying?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes, there are some very minor adjustments. Like whiteboards are supposed to be the be all and end all. Actually, for dyslexic children they are not, because the light shines on them, they need to be sat at the front so the light does not get at it. Often teachers are not aware of that. Copying from the board is a

complete nightmare for dyslexic children, because they have not got the visual memory to be able to look at 2 or 3 words and take it down on to the page. So rather than getting children to copy anyway, give them a handout that is next to them or get them highlighting. There are lots of minor adjustments that would help. The other thing is children who are very dyslexic need to have switch-off time, they are like overloaded sockets. So, you are teaching away and then you look at somebody looking out of the window and to anybody else you would say: "Pay attention" but they absolutely need switch-off time. You have to understand how their brain is working to teach to the way that they can learn.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Ruth, are you talking about whiteboards or SMART Boards?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Well, both. SMART Boards are good because children can interact with them. I can give you an anecdotal example. Some weeks ago my school ran a Victorian day and they used a blackboard with white chalk and this boy that I teach said: "Oh, it was marvellous today, Mrs. Smith." So I said: "Why, darling?" He said, "I could read off the board." I said: "Could you not read before?" and he said: "It is very difficult. It shines across and all the letters and the colours she uses are not good." I mean with 30 years experiences I had not clocked that really. So, it is not a big thing, but for 1 or 2 children in the room the whiteboard might prove difficult. You just have to have an awareness of it. Like what font do you use on your worksheets that are dyslexia friendly? Do you know this? No? Ariel or Comic Sans. I mean, that information is very readily available through the British Dyslexia Association or Dyslexia action. Because dyslexic people have said Ariel and Comic Sans is a good font to use. You might change the paper colour because black print on white paper is not good for some people. It gives a lot of visual stress. So I just print everything I do usually on pale cream or pale blue. I say to children: "Which one would you like?" Rather than just saying to 2 or 3 of them: "Here are your blue copies" because that is not inclusive. One big thing I want to say is that because inclusion is what everybody likes and is absolutely desirable, if you only include all the time by having your teaching assistants in the classroom with the children and you do not pull them out for some specialist teaching, you are actually excluding them because they cannot progress with their reading, their spelling and their writing. I mean reading is the most ... in terms of what the brain has to do, is a world class skill. What your brain has to do every time it reads a word, there are all sorts of neurological happenings going on. It is a very complex process. You have to have a reading level of 9 and a half years. If you can read at 9 and a half when you are reading anything, you can comprehend it. If you are under 9 and a half you are spending so much brain energy on decoding the words, the meaning just goes. They do not get the meaning. They end up having to read something 3, 4, 5 times. So in the workplace, people who have got a low-ish reading age will find that very debilitating because they have to read everything 5 times. If there is lots of noise ... so in a classroom with disruptive children, if there is lots of noise, dyslexic children really physically cannot concentrate and they need to put themselves somewhere very quiet. So, I am absolutely for inclusion and make it accessible for everyone, but there is still a case, I believe, after all these ... you know, I have gone through lots of cycles of educational fashion and what is in vogue and what is not in vogue and from a lot of experience, I know it is really good to take some children out at certain times of the day. You can do it in such a way that they do not feel they are stigmatised. At Grainville we called it Enrichment. At one point of the day, every day, everybody had Enrichment. So the gifted children, because they have got special needs as well, were getting Enrichment. Artistic children, sporty children, children that needed literacy help, it was all called Enrichment. So there was no stigma attached. You can work it in such a way that children do not feel they are being penalised in some way or being made to feel: "Oh, I well must be thick because I have to go out to the learning centre."

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Can I just ask this, Deputy Tadier is going to take the next point, which is quite different, but we have

heard from the unions that our teachers seem to be very much against inclusion policy, which is the current model from Education, in fact, their view seems to be about establishing a completing external agency?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

For suspended children?

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Yes. What would your views be on that?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I think where possible keep them on the main school site, but have a ... I think it has got to be a graduated response. As a classroom teacher I had certain tools at my disposal. I had certain rewards and sanctions. But there comes a point where you have to get the lesson started because everyone else is waiting for you and most of the children are really good and there are these 1 or 2 that have come in and whatever you have got planned, they are not going to buy into it, because they do not think they can do it. They do not think school is for them any more, they are angry, they are frustrated and they do not want to take part. So you have to have a graduated response. So, it should be possible within schools to have areas where they can go that are staffed. They can carry on with their education if you can get them started. Then they can go to maybe a unit as a final resort, on the site. When I was Head of Upper School I would look at areas of flash points and it was very rare that any one child would be unteachable for the whole of the day. It might be that they were only good in P.E. (Physical Education) or only good in Art, but if you have got them on site then you can do a timetable where they can go into lessons where they can be controlled. I do believe that they have to accept consequences of their behaviour. I think they have to have a lot of skills training. It is a very complex issue, why children act up. It is not a simple thing and there are no simple fixes. There is no quick fix. So you have to have a range of things at your disposal. I think, cognitive behaviour therapy has got merit. Often they would behave very well with their worker outside the classroom and then you feed them back into the classroom and it all kicks off again, so you have to have a range of things. You have to have a graduated response. So maybe at the end of the line you have to have somewhere off site. You have to remember as well, for some children, the classroom is the most stressful place. It could be that they have got shades of autism, Asperger's, and they cannot stand noise. So even somebody just banging a ruler, Asperger children are over-sensitive to sensation and noise and light. So something very simple like classroom lighting or children making a lot noise can be unbearable to some children. The more we get aware of that the more I think: "Gosh, you know, I was not very good last year with that child." Even I make a lot of mistakes, I have to say, but not now, because I am not in that situation. So the classroom can be very, very stressful. Sometimes it is their absolute haven. I know when I was working at the Secondary Tutorial Unit ... actually the behaviour there was really good considering they had all been removed from school, because they had a lot more attention, which some of them craved, we fitted the curriculum to the way they worked and we had lots of opportunities for success.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

It seems a good point to come in on Deputy Tadier's question.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Sure. I will just ask the question and then we can come in afterwards maybe. Has there ever been, at any time, a tendency to want to not diagnose or not to label a child as having dyslexia, either in the past or now?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Absolutely, yes. When I came here in the 1970s, it was okay to label people as dyslexic.



**Deputy M. Tadier:**

It was okay?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

It was in the early part of the 1970s. Then Education said that one should not label children as dyslexic. We had to call it Specific Learning Difficulties. That went through ... even now some teachers are very reluctant to use the label and I think it is because of litigation in the U.K. There are lots of court cases where educational authorities have been taken to court because some children's needs have not been met. Once they have had an education psychologist report that says the child is dyslexic - and they were the only people that could say they were dyslexic at one point - once that is in black and white and there are recommendations on that report, schools have to meet those recommendations. They have to meet those needs.

Some parents have been successful in England at suing Education authorities. I think there was a concern that parents would start maybe taking Jersey Education to court. My professional view is that a label is only a signpost for where you go next. So I can talk to an employer when I am placing somebody on work experience and say things like: "Oh, he is not good at filing because alphabetical order is not good but, however, he is really talented at artistic, creative, hands-on things." "He might not be able to read things at great speed." I remember this and I had gone for 20 minutes not using the label: "He is dyslexic" and this chap said: "Oh, you mean he is dyslexic, why did you not say that in the first place? My son is dyslexic, I understand now."

In my experience lots of children and parents feel a huge relief if somebody can say: "Actually, you were born like this, it is a brain difference, it is not your fault, it is not because you have not tried, it is not because you are unintelligent, it is because your brain is slightly different. It is made up slightly differently, you need to have things explained to you in many different ways." It might be kinesthetic, it might be using cards, it might be tactile, it might be auditory as opposed to visual. You have to just find a route in that suits that person. "It is not your fault" and they just feel this huge sense of relief. I always say the only millionaires I know are all dyslexic because they are very good entrepreneurs. It is no barrier to success if it is helped ... if you can get the right sort of help early on. It is only becomes a disability if your literacy skills have not been ... your literacy needs have not been met early on. At the moment the ruling is specialist dyslexia teachers are now allowed to use the label. Because when I was doing my Masters I queried whether we could. So it is a bit ambivalent to answer your question. There have been years where the label has not been allowed to be used. Some people will label a child dyslexic and they are not dyslexic, they have just got a spelling problem. So you have to know what you are doing to be able to say they met the criteria.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Part of the reason I asked the question was there is reason to believe, with regard to other conditions, but we cannot really speak for dyslexia, that it is being used as an excuse not labelling a child ostensibly because they want them to fit in and they do not want them to be marginalised but in fact it may well be that the real reason was because it was just laziness. That it was more convenient not to. Let us say in the case of a pupil with Asperger's. We believe that in Jersey they may have been told not to label them. The real reason is that they did not have follow up with all the special needs and that if they are under staffed they did not have to find an extra staff member. Is there any evidence for that kind of thing going on with regard to dyslexia?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I can think of 2 children whose needs were not met. I am not going to say where and when. But I can think of 2 children that I argued very strongly that they should have been in a unit within a school but because they had many complex problems they did not fit into an Asperger label or dyslexia. In fact they had traits from everything, this one particular boy. So he was expected to manage in mainstream

school when what he needed was a bolt hole. He needed a key worker to address his behaviour problems, frustrations and social training but the educational psychologist that I was working with would not sign it because there are resource implications as you say.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

So that is the reason that they did not want to?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Could I just come in there? Did suspensions result from that sort of lack of picking up any problem?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

It is really hard to say. I can only say from my experience in the Secondary Tutorial Unit of some boys who have been suspended and then when I was working with them I later realised they were dyslexic. You would ask them what led to their suspension and it was lots of anger and frustration because they just felt they could not keep up. They were set up to fail really rather than to succeed. You have to change the whole mindset if you see dyslexia as a brain difference, but it is part of the normal run of things. Do not see it as a separate thing. I do not. I do not berate people having black hair or playing the violin. This one is dyslexic. It is part of the normal population. What you have to think of it as is that they have got huge talents and huge strengths. The reality is you have to address their literacy when they are younger. They have to get to G.C.S.E. (General Certificate of Secondary Education). I am often with 15 year-olds that are really struggling. I say: "Just get through G.C.S.E. and then you can choose your A levels in I.C.T. (Information Communication Technology)" or design or art or fashion or home economy or whatever they call it now, because that is where their talents are. They are superbly intelligent. It is just that on the written literacy side they still struggle because you do not outgrow being dyslexic. Once you are dyslexic, you are always dyslexic and you do have difficulties throughout your life. You just have to find lots of strategies and ways, either a gadget like a spellchecker in your pocket or a good secretary or a dictaphone or repeat back things. If people are firing instructions at you, that is difficult. So you say: "So, what you want me to do is ..." or you record it on a dictaphone or you have a good knowledge of I.T. (Information Technology). There are lots of ways round it. It is like going along a road that has got diversions. You find your way there in the end but you might have got 3 or 4 different routes that you have had to take. That is exactly what it is like working with dyslexic people.

**The Connétable of St. John:**

How do you think the system could be improved?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

First and foremost, another training initiative. As I say, 10 years ago lots of people were offered opportunities to do distance learning qualifications in specific learning difficulties, dyslexia. That has a cost implication.

Recognise that there is a case for taking children out during the school day. Do not just leave them in the classroom 100 per cent of the time because that is not going to do it for them, least of all in secondary school, because by then they will have ... You have to catch children early so lots more clued up people in primary school, including teaching assistants. Offer a lot of training opportunities. As a Dyslexia Association we are bringing people ...

**The Connétable of St. John:**

You are thinking with better training you should be able to catch on to these things before we get into the behavioural issues?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes. It will not sort out everybody because there are many reasons why children act up. It could be they are highly intelligent and they are bored. It could be that they have got terrible worries at home and they are coming into school and they are not available for learning. That is very common.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Just for the record, Ruth - and I do not want to put words in your mouth again but it is one of the real key questions - with your own experience, would you put forward the opinion that you know there is a link between dyslexia and suspensions?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Cannot be more emphatic than that.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Can you describe how that works? Presumably it is a link between dyslexia and the behaviour that would be likely to cause suspensions is another way of phrasing it.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

But is that because either the dyslexia has not been diagnosed or it has been diagnosed but it has not been understood?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

The follow up?

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

That is right.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

What you do about it is the difficult thing. Lots of children can have a diagnosis of specific learning difficulties. They often come up to secondary school from primary school with that. So what has happened? Have they done this? Have they done that? Have they had this? It is terribly hard work when they are younger and you have got to hang in and the parents have got to hang in. It is worth it because then they can learn to read and the spelling will come later. You do not need to be able to spell but you definitely need to be able to read.

What happens is if the follow up has not been done or indeed they have not been picked up, they will keep up for a time but the demands of secondary school outstrip where they are at in their literacy ability. So the gap widens. Whereas they might have come up from primary school just about hanging in and being able to follow what is going on in the science lesson or the English lesson or the geography lesson, because of the readability on worksheets, the readability in text books, the pace of the lesson, the gap widens as they get older. It is not cool to have a helper sitting next to you so they often refuse help. I can think of 2 boys that I tried my damndest to help at Grainville. I really did. I tried every trick in the book and they went, 'no thanks' not buying into it, do not want to know, do not want to do the work at home, do not want to do 5 minutes a day of this, 5 minutes of that.. Both of those boys ended up in La Moye.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Is it fair to say that young people are really totally at the mercy of whether they are lucky enough to be in a school where they have a good overall teacher? It does seem very consistent from what we have heard so far. Is it potluck?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes, it is just I think ... This is my own personal opinion. I have not got any evidence at all for this. But with running the helpline I obviously say which school is your child at and there are certainly some schools that crop up a lot more than others. Some schools crop up and they will liaise with them and they will do everything. They will put in place ... I often suggest a reading manual called *Toe by Toe* which can be done at home with the parent and in school. That takes about a year, a year and a half to do. They will often put that in place. Once they are made more aware of what that child's needs are, they are fantastic at doing it. You can use older children, you see. I used year 10 at Grainville as peer mentors. That was free. They got a community service award for doing it. They felt good about helping. The teenagers did not mind because they looked up to these older children. But again you have to train them. You could not just say sit with this child. You need to have people who know what they are doing and have a big picture of where parents can come in, where specialist teachers can come in, where T.A.s (teachers' assistants), where the school community can come in. It is a whole school event really and celebrate talents of dyslexic people rather than just looking on the dark side. You know, this one is slow or this one cannot read because they have got enormous talents. Loads of famous people are dyslexic: Jamie Oliver, Richard Branson failed miserably at school and often had a miserable time. In answer to Montfort's question, they will under perform. So you might have a very bright child who might perform averagely but to me ... and they might get a handful of Cs at G.C.S.E. but to me that is just as bad as a child that does not get any G.C.S.E.s at all because for that child they should be getting As and A stars. But because they have not been picked up and they have lived on their wits because they are bright, they have got some G.C.S.E.s but it is nowhere near what they should have got. To me that is just as bad as other children that have not got anything. So they leave school with lower qualifications or no qualifications. The job market is difficult anyway. Highlands, yes, they can go through Highlands quite late to start getting them to read better. Although adults, as we know, can learn to read and indeed go right through and take degrees. We have got examples of that, have we not, Gill? Somebody that is on my committee that 9 years ago could not read now she has an Honours degree, social science degree, from Highlands.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Just wanting to push a little bit more. When there is a link between dyslexia and suspensions, is it because of frustration?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes. Feeling idiotic. We have got to be fairly confident, have we not, to have a go and risk failure? In the normal run of things, children should feel happy to put their hand up or say an answer and not worry if it is not right because that is how we learn. They should not be so petrified of making mistakes that they clam up and they cannot write because they do not want to write in case they spell something wrong. The best teachers realise that and they will not mark every spelling wrong. Nothing worse than having something that you spent 2 hours on and it is full of spelling mistakes and somebody has marked it up in red. That still happens. I see that a lot. Maybe mark for what you are looking for in the piece of work like good adjectives or good similes and address the spelling at a different time. They might have tried in the past, they might have failed and now they are not willing to risk getting it wrong. I shadowed somebody for 3 days once at Grainville. It was a really unique experience. I was asked to follow a hearing impaired girl but the by-product of that was I was watching these behaviour problems around the school. One boy did not write one word in 3 days because he was handing out the books, he

had broken his pencil, he had forgotten his book, because he hated writing. He got it wrong. He found very creative ways of not writing and because they move around to different lessons, nobody realised that. I would not have realised it if I had not have been kind of a fly on the wall.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

It seems fine to talk about specialist teachers but from what you are saying it seems that really every teacher needs to be ...

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Absolutely. Every teacher should know the basics about what to look for and how to recognise specific learning difficulties. That depends on continuous professional development. When I was at Grainville we had a very good practice called Twilight Professional Development, C.P.D.. (Continual Professional Development ), where you could offer 40 minute sessions and people could sign up for it. I was often doing awareness raising on dyslexia or what to do like mind mapping which is very good for dyslexic people. It is good for everybody but that particular way of organising your work is an exceptionally good way for dyslexic people. It need not be expensive. You just need people who have got an area of interest of expertise that can put on some fairly low level assessable training. Then you can bring people over to talk to lots of people or you can fund people. I do both. Because I am Chairperson of the Dyslexia Association, we have got someone coming on 13th November which is open to all schools, all teachers, all T.A.s, all educational psychologists. She is going to deal with literacy help up to key stage 3. Next year we have got somebody coming over to talk about dyslexia in the workplace so as to educate ...

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Is that something any of us could sit in on to watch?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes, anybody is welcome. It is a D'Auvergne School. It is from 4.00 p.m. till 6.00 p.m. on Friday, 13th November. She is a really good ... I am hoping she is anyway. She has got very good press. Victoria Crivelli. She is a member of the British Dyslexia Association, I.T. specialist. She is talking about practical games and activities that can be done in classrooms. Every teacher needs to know because there are going to be at least 2 dyslexic children in your class, at least. Some more severe than others. The E2L (English as second language) children - the Portuguese, the Polish - are more difficult to pick up because you tend to think that is a language thing. They can be just as dyslexic but you have got to have that background to know that they are dyslexic rather than this is just a language because a lot of teachers will put that down to this is their second language. They did not come over here until they were 8 or 10.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Is there any information you can give us on that issue, numbers wise, from your own experience?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Of suspensions?

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Linking to people who English is not their first language so that gets missed as you say.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I am sorry, Trevor, no. It is all findable from the British Dyslexia Association or Dyslexic Action. They often do research. I can highly recommend something called the Rose Report. You might have heard of it. Sir Jim Rose, 4 years ago was it, did a big paper on children's reading. From that he was asked to

look at dyslexia teaching and people with literacy difficulties. It was out in September and it is free. The Rose Report, I have written it on here. This article was in the *Times* educational supplement last week on behaviour and suspensions. It absolutely sums up the complexity of it and the issues. It is not that long. I know you have got lots of papers to read but it does give you some feel for what it is like to be a teacher on the receiving end. I must say I used to wake up some mornings thinking: "Oh God, I have got that class" and I have had lots of experience and I think I can cope with lots of behaviour problems. But it is very tricky.

**Professor P. Munn:**

Do you think the numbers of children with dyslexia are underestimated in Jersey?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes. There is still an issue about how to define dyslexia. Even the experts argue. I think of it as a language processing difficulty but not just affecting reading and writing but perhaps receiving instructions, acting on instructions, sequencing because it is all to do with what the left brain does, memory, personal ... that impacts on personal organisation.

**Professor P. Munn:**

Would the psychological service agree with that definition?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I hope so. I am in discussion at the moment with one of the E.P.s (Educational Psychologist) who has put out a paper on literacy. She said children with literacy difficulties need ... I cannot remember the phrase but the next line was: "Dyslexia comes from the Greek word ..." So I said to her, so you are saying everyone with literacy difficulties is dyslexic? She said, yes. This is an education psychologist. I said: "I am sorry, Carol, I cannot agree with that. I do not agree with that." She said: "It is anybody with reading and spelling problems." I said: "No, because it is a much wider thing than that." You can pick up children that cannot spell for all sorts of reasons. They have missed it, they have not listened, they have had hearing ... glue ear.

**Professor P. Munn:**

So there will be confusion about the criteria for opening a record of need? That is where I am going with this.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Yes. I have a kind of tick sheet for parents because I like that background information. But one thing in itself is not significant, it is when you get lots of factors, like someone else in the family is dyslexic, because 75 per cent is inherited although it can be acquired through either illness or brain damage. Interestingly, I am looking at somebody with a stroke at the moment that has acquired dyslexia. Do you say someone is dyslexic just because they have not learnt to read? Not before you have checked out lots of other things. It could be that they have not been taught. One of those. They have moved round a lot and they have had 17 supply teachers in one year. Everybody assumes they have done a piece of the phonic ... when you are teaching reading it is systematic and cumulative. It has got to be systematic and cumulative and lots of opportunities to go back and reinforce. If they have missed out a chunk, that building block is not there and they never get it unless you revisit it. Sorry, I have gone on a long time.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

No, it is also really informative.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Good background information I think and it is all very useful. I was just going to ask if there is an

understanding that suspensions or exclusions, whatever we think about them or the teachers, is that they are used as a last resort. Is that what you have found in your experience that they are being used?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I would say that some children needed to go a lot sooner because the impact on other people's education was dreadful. I felt very bad about some children when I was Head of Upper school, that they had had to put up with certain children for a time, longer than I think they should have done. It is a professional call, is it not?

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Yes, sure.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

When do you pull them out? When you have tried all this, that and the other.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

So it is not being over used or abused in that sense, if anything ...

**Ms. R. Smith:**

I have been 5 years out of the States system so I am 5 years out of it.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

Sure.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

But I still talk to people in the States system and I still ask how things are going and things. I think certainly there was a period of time at Grainville where I was - and that is the only place I can talk about - where we tolerated ... we really did try absolutely everything and it was to the detriment of other people's education.

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

What I found quite interesting, if I have interpreted it correctly, is your idea of inclusion. There is a debate between exclusion and inclusion. You seem to be advocating inclusion but at a much earlier stage to be incorporated into the whole teaching methodology.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

By inclusion, do you mean having them in the class at all costs or do you mean keeping them in the school but maybe doing some separate teaching?

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

What I mean is just in the broad sense, in the teaching sense, to try and be as accessible and to adapt the teaching methods so that you do not get to the point where you ...

**Ms. R. Smith:**

There is an old Chinese saying, is there not, it is not Can you learn the way I teach? Sorry, I have got it the wrong way round now. It is not Can you learn the way I teach? It is Can I teach the way you learn.?

**Deputy M. Tadier:**

That is right.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Because some children have to fiddle and jump around. Why are we trapping them behind a desk for 50 minutes? That is just a simple example. You might give them something to hold and squeeze because they are going to be bashing. There is research that says if you fill up their kinesthetic channel by getting them to hold and squeeze something, they can listen. That is how I teach, myself. I offer them things to hold while I am talking to them. But there are rules about that. They do not chuck them around the class. They do not make a noise with them. But that is infinitely better than going ... because when you are in a conference as an adult, you look round, 50 per cent of the room will be doodling or twitching or moving around. That is just the way they are. They are not A.D.H.D. (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). There is nothing wrong with them. It is just the way they are. Some children respond much better auditorally than visually. The best teaching is multi sensory, systematic and cumulative. If everybody did that, there would be very few problems except the ones that come in who have got these enormous difficulties in their other life and, as I say, they are not available for learning. If you have just watched your father try to commit suicide - as I know some children that I was dealing with at Grainville did - and we are expecting them to take a science test that they were supposed to have learned last night. You know, do not berate them for not getting down to it because that was out of their control. It is a big picture. Trevor said this morning it is not simple. The more you look at cases, the more intriguing they are really, I think.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Unfortunately we are running out of time unless the panel has got any last ones. Is there anything else that you want to say to us, Ruth, because it has been really interesting and really helpful.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Okay. Once I have retired which is in 2 years' time, I am going to give a big personal ... I am a bit like on a crusade at the moment because of handling the helpline. It would not take long to get schools back into focus because we were there kind of 10 years' ago. We had a big thrust, as I say. Money was being put our way to do professional training. So I will be raising awareness. But just do not think teaching assistants are the be all and end all because they are not. They are a cheap option. That is what unfortunately has happened in a lot of cases and it is not an answer. Have a balance of both, yes? Thank you for letting me spout off.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Thank you very much.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

This is your homework.(a photo copied article from the Times Ed supplement) I hope that something positive will come out of it.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

If we think of anything else, you are happy for us to contact you?

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Absolutely, yes.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**

Thank you.

**Ms. R. Smith:**

Thank you.

**Deputy T.M. Pitman:**



Thank you. We will end the session there. Thank you, the members of the public.