

# Children with reading and spelling difficulties lag behind their peers despite special education

April 25 2017

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The reading skills of children with reading and spelling difficulties (RSD) lag far behind the age level in the first two school years, despite special education received from special education teachers.

Furthermore, the spelling skills of children who in addition to RSD had other learning difficulties also lagged behind their peers in the first two school years. The follow-up study was carried out at the University of Eastern Finland and the findings were published in the *European Journal of Special Needs Education*.

"Our findings are relevant both in terms of teacher [education](#) and in terms of special education resources schools allocate to reading and [spelling](#) skills," says Professor of Special Education Leena Holopainen from the University of Eastern Finland, summing up the findings.

In the Finnish education system, students do not need a formal diagnosis to receive special educational services, and the need for support is assessed in collaboration between the student, the parents and the teacher.

On a positive note, two thirds of children who had RSD and who lagged behind the age level received part-time special education approximately once a week during their first and second [school](#) years.

"However, one third of children received part-time special education

only either in their first or in their second year of school, and the average amount was less than 30 hours per year."

In children with RSD and also other learning difficulties, the level of [reading skills](#) lagged far behind the age level, and the gap continued to grow during the first two school years.

"This warrants the question of whether the contents and teaching methods used in special education meet the needs of children. Do we have enough skilled special education teachers capable of helping children with reading and spelling difficulties?"

According to Professor Holopainen, it is important for schools to find ways to organise their special education in reading and spelling in a way that provides sufficiently efficient support to all children who need it also after the first school year.

"Approximately 10-15 per cent of primary school children suffer from developmental reading and spelling difficulties. Identifying these [children](#) as early on as possible and making [special education](#) available to them is of key importance in overcoming RSD and in preventing other, secondary difficulties in learning and studying," Professor Holopainen concludes.

**More information:** Leena K. Holopainen et al, The role of part-time special education supporting students with reading and spelling difficulties from grade 1 to grade 2 in Finland, *European Journal of Special Needs Education* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2017.1312798](https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1312798)

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

Citation: Children with reading and spelling difficulties lag behind their peers despite special education (2017, April 25) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-04-children-difficulties-lag-peers-special.html>

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