

You Can... **Explore possible reading difficulties**

It is always worth questioning whether an apparent reluctance to read is masking a reading difficulty. Even very young children can hide a difficulty with distracting behaviours in order to focus attention on something that they can control (the behaviour) rather than something over which they have no control (the reading difficulty). Not all reluctant readers have reading difficulties, but some of them do.

Thinking points

- What is your attitude (and that of your school and local authority) to diagnosing reading difficulties in young children? Some people are vehemently against early diagnosis, arguing that many problems will rectify themselves if children are given appropriate support and are allowed to develop at their own pace, without pressure. Others argue that early intervention is crucial in order to minimise disruption to a child's education.
- Part of the problem with early diagnosis is that young children develop at vastly different rates. Labelling a child as having reading difficulties too soon may make them self-conscious about reading and alert them to how difficult it is. On the other hand, allowing children to move through school as non-readers will inevitably lead to problems of low self-esteem and self-belief.

Tips, ideas and activities

- The ideas in this book will offer you guidance on the signs to look for if you think a child has a reading difficulty.
- As part of your own exploration into the likelihood of there being a reading difficulty, use the photocopiable 'Child's profile' on page 56 to keep a regular record of the child's progress while, at the same time, you try to find out more about the child's development.
- Begin with the easy things: has the child had a recent vision and hearing test? If so, what were the results? Has the child ever been referred to a speech and language therapist?
- Compare the progress the child is making in reading with that made in the rest of the curriculum. In particular, what are their fine and gross motor skills like? How well developed is the vocabulary for maths? Does the child understand the concepts of time such as *before*, *after*, *first*, or the language of length such as *longer*, *shorter* and so on?
- If the child appears to have problems across the curriculum you will need to consider whether this is due to maturity, to social and domestic issues or to other problems. If there are no obvious reasons for the child's global lack of attainment, you may want to refer to your SENCO for further advice.
- If you think that the problems are specific to reading and writing, try the photocopiable sheet 'Phonological awareness MOT' on page 57.
- Whether or not you request additional help for the child, you will need to continue to promote learning. Use results of your assessment – together with ideas in this book – to develop reading skills as far as you can, without putting undue stress on the child.