

Dyslexia: Information for Teachers

Throughout their career, all mainstream teachers will have children with dyslexia in their class. They are the pupils who, from the beginning, struggle with reading, writing and/or spelling and possibly numeracy. However, they may be creative, articulate, imaginative or perform well in practical subjects. These children need to be identified, supported and closely monitored **as early as possible** to help them to succeed.

General indicators of dyslexia

- Might appear to be 'bright' in some areas but have a 'block' in others
- Poor letter-sound recognition, awareness of sight vocabulary and sequential ordering
- Poor short-term working memory – difficulty following instructions, forgets to do things
- Slow at information-processing – spoken and/or written language
- Might have a limited concentration span

Reading and writing

- Poor standard of written work in comparison with oral language skills
- Incorrect or confused sentence structure
- Planning difficulties; 'muddled' sequencing of ideas/events; confusion with tenses
- Incomplete, 'messy' or disorganised presentation of written work
- Poor letter formation and spacing; difficulties with pencil grip and control
- Frequent letter and number reversals (b/d; p/q/g; 2/5; 6/9)
- Limited or incorrect use of punctuation
- Inconsistent spelling – spelling a word several ways in the same piece of writing
- Difficulty remembering the spelling of common irregular words - 'said', 'they'
- Confused order of letters in words for reading and spelling - gril/girl; word reversals - saw/was; on/no
- Unusual or phonetic spelling which is not age-appropriate
- Omits letters and/or syllables in words; misses out or adds words into sentences
- Appears to dislike or avoid writing activities
- Difficulty with blending letter-sounds to read words, and reluctance to read aloud
- Problems with breaking words into syllables
- Reads without expression in a slow, hesitant, manner with inaccuracies
- Doesn't recognise familiar words – even when read earlier in the text or on the same page
- Problems with copying information

- Tendency to lose the place; problems with scanning text from left to right
- Difficulty with comprehension and/or picking out the main points
- May disregard, or rely on, context and/or picture cues to aid comprehension

Numeracy and time

- Difficulty with sequential order, multiplication tables, days of the week
- Confusion with mathematical symbols such as + and x signs
- Difficulty understanding the concept of place value
- Problems with reading/understanding the language of maths
- Confused by positional language and directions - before/after; top/bottom; x/y axis
- Problems with telling the time, time-management and/or concepts of time - yesterday, tomorrow
- Difficulty with sequence and direction of procedures; copying or layout of written work

Behaviour

- Appears to be disorganised and/or confused by everyday tasks
- Uses avoidance tactics - looking for equipment, sharpening pencils
- Performance/standard of work is inconsistent – has 'good days' and 'bad days'
- Seems restless, easily distracted, inattentive and/or easily tired
- Has little to show for a huge amount of effort; frustrated by lack of achievement
- May adopt the role of 'class clown', be withdrawn, uncooperative or disruptive

Remember that every child with dyslexia is different and has individual difficulties and strengths.

How teachers can help

- Although children with dyslexia will need additional targeted support, there are many ways that teachers can help in the mainstream classroom. Minor changes to day-to-day practice can make a huge difference towards effective learning.

Seating and grouping

- Check that each child can hear and see you, the board and visual prompts clearly
- Seat the pupil where you can make eye contact and provide support quickly
- Group pupils according to each activity, not by literacy level, unless specifically teaching literacy skills

Information, instructions, organisation

- Give children thinking time to process information and respond appropriately
- Make instructions short and simple. Break them down into small steps
- Explain and present information many times in various ways (pictures, flow charts, diagrams)
- Ask pupils with dyslexia to repeat instructions so you can check their understanding
- Display prompts and reminders about what to do, where to find things, useful words
- Put labels on equipment and always keep them in the same place
- Provide desk-top mats/jotter inserts - word banks, prompts and personal targets
- Provide (and demonstrate how to use) practical aids such as calculators, number/tables squares

Memory

- Use multi-sensory approaches to ensure that information is absorbed and stored.
- Teach a range of strategies to help children learn letter sounds and spelling rules.
- Many children with dyslexia are kinaesthetic learners - they learn by doing. Engage them in purposeful movement, using rhythm and visual activities to stimulate memory and trigger recall

Written work

- Encourage alternatives to writing – drawing, dictating/recording answers.
- Check children's learning by requesting non-written responses - draw, act out, sing, dictate answers
- Limit writing demands and give plenty of time to complete written work
- Ensure that keyboard skills are taught - encourage the use of a computer
- Provide planning formats/writing frames/ /story skeletons for extended writing
- Teach children how to use mind maps, spider webs, bullet points, flow charts, ICT

Marking

- Develop a code with your pupils for marking errors. Using a cross or red pen to highlight errors may not be the best way – lightly underline or use a dot
- Try to explain errors made by marking their work with the pupil present
- Specify what will be marked - content, spelling, technical skills or presentation - and mark only that
- Minimise the number of errors you highlight – perhaps only one of each type. Suggest how to avoid these in the future
- Use directed praise – say what you are praising – include effort as well as attainment
- Avoid negative feedback in front of the class; give individual feedback privately

Reading

- Provide tinted filters/overlays or reading markers
- Use non-white paper and ask individual preferences for test papers
- Match reading resources to reading ability, ensuring that it is age appropriate
- Encourage the use of books in audio/digital format to support access to texts
- Teach the use of keywords, highlighting, colours and images to help remember information
- Highlight the main points in text to support comprehension, prediction and recall
- Teach key vocabulary for new topics – use flash cards, word mats, posters/word walls
- Ensure that the child is comfortable reading aloud – unless planned/prepared in advance
- Introduce paired/shared reading activities to improve fluency, aid understanding and build confidence

Board work

- Limit the amount of reading/copying from the board. Give copies of notes/examples
- Use coloured markers for board work. Try some of the following strategies:
 - Set the Smart board background on a colour – beige, blue
 - Shade white boards to eliminate glare/reflections
 - Write different items in different colours
 - Number or mark the start and end of each line/topic clearly

More in-depth information to help in the classroom

- 📖 **Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit** – www.addressingdyslexia.org
- 📖 **Dyslexia: A Practitioner's Handbook (4th Edition)** by Dr. Gavin Reid
- 📖 **Maths for the Dyslexic:** A practical guide by Anne Henderson
- 📖 **Dyslexia Pocketbooks (Teachers Pocketbooks)** by Julie Bennett & Phil Hailstone
- 📖 **Supporting Students with Dyslexia in Secondary Schools** by Moira Thomson
- 📖 **The Teaching Assistant's Guide to Dyslexia** by Gavin Reid & Shannon Green
- 📖 **100 Ideas for Primary/Secondary Teachers for Supporting Children with Dyslexia** by Gavin Reid & Shannon Green
- 📖 **The Little Book of Dyslexia** by Joe Beech

