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# Meeting the needs of dyslexic learners

A professional guide for teachers

In partnership with



# What is this guide for?

It is estimated that one person in ten is dyslexic, and of those, one in four severely so. Throughout your career, you will have children and young people with dyslexia in your class. Mostly children with dyslexia have difficulties with learning to read, write, spell and/or with numeracy from early in their schooling. However, they may be creative, talented, articulate and imaginative or perform well practically. Equally, there may be other children and young people experiencing challenges in their learning because of dyslexia, which are less obvious.

Early identification, appropriate intervention and targeted effective teaching will enable learners with dyslexia to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Dyslexia is life-long and can run in families.

There is a [Scottish definition of dyslexia](#): *'Dyslexia can be described as a continuum of difficulties in learning to read, write and/or spell, which persist despite the provision of appropriate learning opportunities. These difficulties often do not reflect an individual's cognitive abilities and may not be typical of performance in other areas.'*

The visual image of that definition on

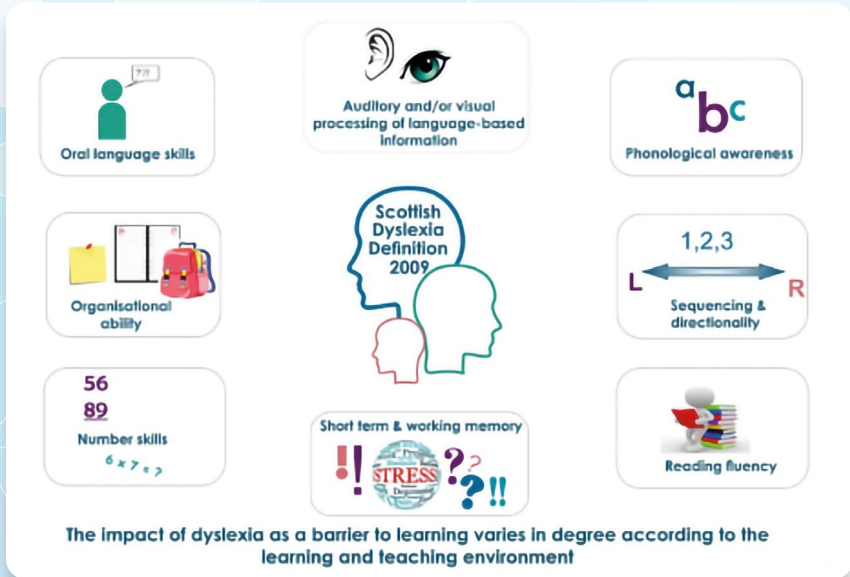
the next page shows how, without the right support, dyslexia can be a barrier to learning.

The purpose of this Professional Guide is to provide support for teachers to reflect on their actions and consider whether they may need further advice or professional learning. This guide is intended to complement your employer's policies and to help you understand what dyslexia is and your role in supporting learners with dyslexia in the classroom.

A series of guides have been produced by GTC Scotland, two of which are on autism and neurodiversity and may be helpful further reading on additional support needs. You can access all the guides on the [GTC Scotland website](#).

These guides do not form part of the Professional Code for teachers. Teachers and schools may find them useful professional learning and discussion tools but they are not intended for use in any competency or conduct process. They are part of GTC Scotland's services to teachers to enhance teacher professionalism as part of our advisory role as the professional body for all of Scotland's teachers.

# What is expected of teachers?



As set out in the Professional Standards for Teachers, you should demonstrate commitment to the professional values of integrity, trust and respect and social justice in all aspects of your role as a teacher. Supporting learners and other members of the school community who have dyslexia is a key part of that role. All teachers should understand what dyslexia means for learners and should be aware of what support is available. Class teachers are in the best position to identify early indicators of dyslexia.

The [Review of Additional Support for Learning Implementation \(2020\)](#) highlights that all teachers should hold and enact professional values of inclusion and inclusive practice.

Teachers should be positive role models and demonstrate welcoming, encouraging and inclusive behaviours. In doing so, teachers align with the expectations of the Equality Act 2010 and the [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2004 \(as amended\)](#), which set out the legal requirements to protect people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and for the provision of additional support for learning. Four key features of inclusive practice in schools are that the children and young people are present, participating, achieving and supported.

# How to support dyslexic children and young people

## Addressing Dyslexia in the Scottish education context

Education Scotland's *'Making Sense' report 2014* highlighted that young people with dyslexia attain significantly less well than their peers who do not have additional support needs. However, dyslexia occurs at any level of intellectual ability. Many people with dyslexia are high achievers and perform very well in school. Your role as a teacher is to be aware of your pupil's strengths and needs, and provide appropriate classroom support to allow every learner to demonstrate their potential and knowledge.

Scotland's education system is designed to be inclusive for all children and young people, with or without additional support needs. Scotland's 'needs-led' and 'rights-based' educational system places the learner at the centre. The provision of support is not dependent upon a formal label such as dyslexia, autism, physical disability or mental health. However, identifying dyslexia as early as possible will support future learning, teaching and wellbeing. It can be extremely important to individuals and their families to know that

their child is dyslexic as it can support their understanding of what dyslexia means for them.

As well as understanding what dyslexia is, you need to be aware of your employer's staged intervention process and dyslexia policy. For example, your employer may have an identification pathway, forms and templates.

Although children with dyslexia may need additional targeted support, teachers can help in many ways in the mainstream classroom. Minor changes to day-to-day practice can make a huge difference towards effective learning. Dyslexia-friendly approaches to learning and teaching benefit all learners.

## Understanding dyslexia

Dyslexia does not solely affect reading, writing and spelling. Other causal factors such as short-term, working memory and processing issues may also act as barriers to learning. Every child and young person with dyslexia is different, with individual difficulties and strengths. Finding and building on those strengths is vital.

The broad range of characteristics experienced by dyslexic learners overlap with many characteristics of other neuro-developmental differences.

There can be links to other learning differences like dyspraxia, dyscalculia, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Autism.

## General indicators of dyslexia



- Might appear to be 'bright' in some areas but have a 'block' in others (although this is not always the case).
- 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.

## 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 seek to avoid tasks, be withdrawn, uncooperative or disruptive.

## What can help?



- Peer support for help with reading/writing activities.
- Use of mind-mapping or flow charts for project management.
- Regular tasks and instructions broken down into graphics.
- Use of coloured overlays and coloured paper.
- Assistive Technology for reading, writing and recording of information.
- Sometimes asking the individual to suggest solutions to problems can produce simple but effective results.

# What you can do

Ask yourself the following reflective questions to support your understanding and practice:

- Do I understand what dyslexia is and how it may affect learners in my classroom?
- Am I aware that there may be learners with dyslexia who can read and write well but who face other associated barriers to learning?
- How do I know that my teaching maximises the strengths and supports the challenges of learners with dyslexia?
- Do I look beyond the behaviours of my learners to understand why they may be struggling with their learning?
- Am I familiar with teaching approaches that support dyslexic learners and that support a wide range of other learners as well? How do I know if my classroom is an inclusive environment for all learners?
- How do I know I listen effectively to my learners and support them to participate in developing strategies that help their learning?
- Do I communicate clearly to parents and carers about what the school is doing to assess and support their children's dyslexia?



- How do I know I effectively involve parents and carers in contributing to and understanding how their children who have dyslexia learn?
- Do I understand my role and that of colleagues in my local authority within the staged intervention and assessment process for learners with additional support needs, including dyslexia?
- Have I considered the suggestions to support dyslexia and inclusive practice in the [\*Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice: Professional Learning Resource?\*](#)

# Additional resources

*Guides on autism and neurodiversity have been produced as part of this series of professional guides.* [↗](#)

Dyslexia Scotland's **Top Ten Resources for teachers** includes free professional learning modules, which support GTC Scotland Professional Standards, Professional Update and Professional Recognition. They are primarily for teachers, school management and GTC Scotland registered local authority education officers. Also included in the Top Ten Resources is the **Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit**, which provides a wide range of information and guidance on supporting learners including **Dyslexia Identification Pathway** and form templates.

Other helpful resources include

- **Additional support for learning review, 2020** [↗](#)
- Addressing Dyslexia Toolkit's **useful film about Communicating with families** [↗](#)
- **At Home with Dyslexia Scotland**: information and advice for dyslexic people and their families during Covid-19 and beyond. [↗](#)
- Dyslexia Scotland's YouTube channel films including **Young Ambassador Rachel Miller's advice for schools** [↗](#)
- Dyslexia Scotland's Ambassador outreach programme: **Mission Superheroes Professional Learning Resource** for Primary 4–7 pupils [↗](#)
- **The Dyslexia and Inclusive Practice: Professional Learning Resource, 2020** [↗](#)
- **GTC Scotland's Professional Standards for Teachers** [↗](#)
- **Guidance on the presumption to provide education in a mainstream setting, 2019** [↗](#)
- Making Sense: Education for Children and Young People with Dyslexia in Scotland, Education Scotland, 2014.
- The Making Sense Final Report, Scottish Government and Education Scotland, 2020.
- **Neurodiversity Model** [↗](#)
- **Scottish Definition of Dyslexia** [↗](#)



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