

Supporting Pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia) in Secondary Schools

A quick guide to supporting the needs of pupils with dyslexia



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Supporting Pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia) in Secondary Schools

A quick guide to supporting the needs of pupils with dyslexia

This guide is for SENCOs and whole-school staff.



This guide aims to:

- + help the SENCO in establishing a consistent whole-school approach to meeting the needs of pupils with dyslexia
- + support all teachers and support staff in developing a dyslexia-friendly learning environment
- + develop teaching and learning strategies that make the curriculum accessible to learners with dyslexia
- + suggest resources which SENCOs and teachers can access to support pupils' learning and help them develop coping strategies.

The policy context

The increased demands of learning in a secondary school make it difficult for pupils with dyslexia to reach their full potential. Without support they will struggle to access the curriculum and cope with the quantity and quality of reading and writing and increasing demands as they approach exams.

Ofsted's reports *Moving English forward* (2012) and *Removing barriers to literacy* (2011) highlight that too many children and young people are not making the expected progress at the beginning of





their education. One in five pupils entering secondary school has not reached an expected level in reading and writing.

Moving English forward identifies ten actions to raise standards, including more effective teaching of writing, with a greater emphasis on spelling and handwriting. Pupils need a wider reading base, and continuity in the teaching of English, especially reading, from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Under the new inspection framework for schools there is a greater focus on literacy and reading relating to pupil achievement, quality of teaching, leadership and management.

All staff need to be aware of their respective contributions as teachers of literacy in providing evidence for whole-school improvement and inspection.

The Code of Practice (2014) further emphasises the importance of high-quality teaching and individualised differentiation to provide a person-centred approach to learning for pupils. The progress made by pupils is seen as one of the core aspects of the school's performance management arrangements in relation to professional development for all teaching and support staff. There is an increased focus on the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people in decision making.

The role of the SENCO

In secondary schools, the SENCO's responsibilities typically cover areas such as:

- Middle leadership: strategic management of special educational needs, determining the SEN policy and developing provision in school, along with the headteacher and governing body.
- Auditing staff skills and facilitating appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) to ensure that pupils' learning needs are met.
- Co-ordinating specific provision for pupils with SEN and an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- Providing guidance and signposting to colleagues, parents and carers to services, including those available in the local authority's local offer.
- Monitoring and providing evidence of the progress made by pupils.
- Supporting the transition of students with dyslexia between Key Stages 2 and 3 and on entry to a college of further education.

What is the challenge?

Dyslexia is a hidden disability thought to affect around 10% of the population, and 4% severely. It is the most common of the specific learning difficulties. Although weakness in the area of literacy is often the most visible sign, dyslexia

A definition of dyslexia

The Rose Report in 2009 provided a definition of dyslexia:

- **Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.**
- **Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.**
- **Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.**
- **Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.**
- **A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention.**

affects the way information is processed, stored and retrieved.

The Rose Report definition describes the phonological deficit, highlighting that pupils with dyslexia have difficulty processing sound, retaining information that is heard and processing at an age-appropriate speed. This adversely

affects reading and spelling and prevents pupils achieving automaticity in these areas. This, in turn, causes problems accessing the curriculum and achieving their full potential academically. Poor working memory, which is an indicator of attainment, also impairs their learning. Reasonable adjustments need to be made in the way teachers impart information, structure and support classroom-based tasks and facilitate learning.

In addition, the magnocellular deficit or visual disturbance/stress is often included under the umbrella term of dyslexia. Visual disturbance/stress causes words and letters to move on the page, making fluent and accurate reading difficult. Pupils may experience discomfort and headaches when trying to read black text on white paper, screens or whiteboards.

It is important that these are seen as discrete approaches to dyslexic difficulties, although a pupil may have both deficits. A diagnostic assessment is necessary to ensure that the correct support is put in place.

The challenge is meeting the specific needs of individual pupils with dyslexia. Each pupil will have a unique profile with different areas of severity. The instance of co-occurrence with other specific learning difficulties (SpLD) is high, making the complexity of their needs greater. Many pupils with dyslexia may have one or more of the following specific learning difficulties: attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (ADD/ADHD),

dyscalculia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia and autism spectrum disorder. Recognising the pupil's specific learning difficulty is vital in providing the correct support.

Screening and identification

The SENCO and senior leaders need to determine a process for screening and identifying pupils with dyslexia. CAT (cognitive assessment test) scores identify pupils with literacy difficulties requiring further investigation. A parent, carer or young person over 16 years of age can request an assessment. Teachers have a vital role to play in recognising behaviours that may be indicators of dyslexia, which can initially be identified through the introduction of classroom checklists.

There are many screeners that identify dyslexic traits in a pupil. These can be computer based (for example, www.Lucid-Research.com) or in a paper-based format (for example, Dyslexia Portfolio GL assessment at www.gl-assessment.co.uk and Pearson's Dyslexia Screening Test at www.pearsonclinical.com). It is important that schools make an educated choice of the screener that best fits their context.

Assessment for visual stress can use ICT (for example, Lucid VISS at www.Lucid-Research.com) or paper-based methods (Crossbow's Visual Stress Assessment Pack at www.crossboweducation.com/crossbow-brand/visual-stress and Wilkins Rate of Reading Test at www.ioosales.co.uk/html/practice/eye05F.html).

When selecting a suitable screener, consider:

- the level of qualification and experience in dyslexia of the person delivering and interpreting the screening and making recommendations
- the number of pupils requiring screening per year
- the attitude, motivation and test behaviour of the pupil(s) using the screener.

A full diagnostic report can be conducted by an educational psychologist or a

specialist teacher with a Postgraduate SpLD Diploma Level 7.

In the classroom

The key principle for providing a dyslexia-friendly learning environment is consistency throughout the school and across the whole staff, teaching and non-teaching. Pupils with dyslexia have to put in an enormous effort to cope with the daily challenges of the school day. It is particularly hard at secondary school where they have different subject



teachers who may have varying levels of expectation, understanding and knowledge of their disorder. These pupils thrive in an organised setting where the resources are varied and appropriate. The pupils should be taught how to use the learning tools available. These must be accessible to all pupils so that they control when they need them and the tools are accepted as common practice.



Classroom organisation

- Maintain a tidy, organised classroom.
- Change the part of the classroom in which you are teaching, for example writing on the desk, floor or whiteboard.
- Sit the pupil with dyslexia at the front of the class.
- Provide handouts with key points highlighted rather than expect pupils to copy from the board.
- Set up a buddy system for support.
- Provide teaching assistant support to help the pupil get organised and check their understanding of instructions.

Resources for literacy

- Individual personalised dictionaries, with the area of the word they find difficult to spell highlighted
- Writing frames
- Lists of sentence starters
- Lists of linking words, for example after, before, despite, if, only
- A record of words generated during the lesson
- Whiteboards and coloured pens
- Pastel coloured paper and notebooks
- A selection of pens and Post-it notes
- Relevant reminders to support individual learning activities
- Handouts to support tasks, for example a visual checklist.

For pupils with visual stress

The main considerations for meeting the needs of a pupil with visual stress include reducing the contrast between black



text and white background and limiting the amount of visual information to be possessed. Consider using some of the following:

- Coloured overlays
- Cream paper for handouts and exercise books
- Pastel or cream background for computers and *PowerPoint* presentations
- Font size: minimum 12 point for paper and 28 point for *PowerPoint*
- Texts in a sans serif font such as Verdana, Century Gothic, Tahoma, Arial, Comic Sans, Trebuchet, Calibri
- Left-justified text
- Bold to emphasise text; avoiding italics or underlining or TEXT WRITTEN IN CAPITALS
- 1.5 line spacing.

More detailed guidelines can be found in the British Dyslexia Association Style Guide: www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/about-

dyslexia/further-information/dyslexia-style-guide.html/

Classroom displays

Ensure that your classroom displays:

- are informative, interactive and relevant
- are uncluttered so that information can be easily found
- can be seen from every position in the classroom and used regularly by all pupils as a point of reference
- show a good use of colour – avoid white background and black text
- show key words that are understood by all pupils
- celebrate pupils' work and make them feel valued.

One of the primary advantages of a well-resourced classroom is reducing pressure on the working memory. Teaching also has an important part to play in this.

Teaching

The SEND Code of Practice, section 1.24 says, 'Special educational provision is underpinned by high quality teaching and is compromised by anything less.'

Teachers need to be aware of which pupils have dyslexia and what their areas of specific difficulty are. When providing specific support, teachers must be aware of the emotional consequences of having dyslexia. Providing an inclusive learning environment where pupils' needs are met without drawing attention to their difficulties will limit feelings of embarrassment and frustration.

The findings of the Sutton Trust (2013) highlight the importance of developing metacognitive skills in pupils to increase the progress made in their learning (see The Sutton Trust EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit>). Strategies for utilising metacognition – learning to learn – have been listed in each section of the teaching guidelines below to support teachers in developing these skills.

Key strategies for reading

Pupils with dyslexia can become fluent readers, although the speed at which they read and their ability to comprehend long, complex texts can remain impaired. They may have to read a text several times to reach the same level of understanding as other students. Strategies to support reading difficulties include:



- Only ask a pupil to read aloud if you know they want to.
- Ensure that books are at the right level of difficulty for pupils.
- Provide text-to-speech software such as *Texthelp* and *ClaroRead*.
- Use audio books when appropriate.
- Teach reading skills, such as skimming, scanning and closed reading, and when to use them.
- Limit the quantity of reading they have to do by guiding pupils to relevant strategies.



- Provide texts before the lesson so that pupils can prepare for them.
- Encourage pupils to condense and make sense of what they read, for example by making mind maps and drawing diagrams and flow charts.
- Pre-teach key vocabulary.
- Encourage the pupils to take a metacognitive approach:
 - Question the writer’s intentions.
 - Reflect on the writer’s approach and ask if it could be improved.
 - Consider your own views in relation to the text read and whether your opinions have changed.
- Ascertain what you have learnt and how you will transfer this new learning.
- Instil in your pupils a desire to read by providing reading materials that are of interest to them.
- Ensure that there are books of high interest and low ability available.
- Use paired reading approaches.
- Lead pupils into the book using questioning techniques.

Key strategies for spelling

Spelling will remain a persistent difficulty for pupils with dyslexia. It is important that spelling difficulties do not impede pupils' creativity and ability to demonstrate their knowledge. It is important to encourage the use of ambitious words and teach pupils to spell key curricular words.

- Provide subject-specific key words in classroom handouts.
- Encourage the use of personalised dictionaries.
- Encourage pupils to take risks with their spelling, suggesting that they underline these words.

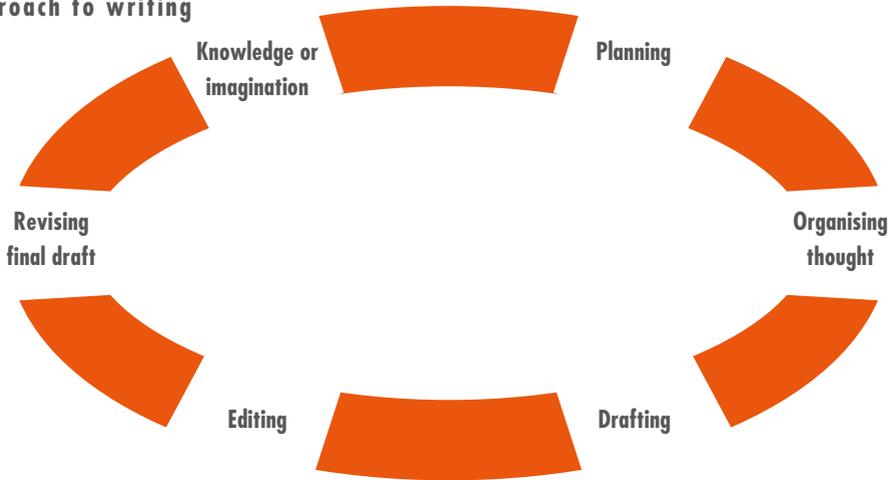
- Teach the spelling of key words in a multi-sensory way.
- Encourage a metacognitive approach by asking pupils to:
 - analyse the spelling mistakes and identify the learning required
 - decide what they will change to ensure that they spell that word correctly in future.

Key strategies for writing

Writing is a difficult medium for pupils with dyslexia to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and creativity. They find it hard to interpret the questions and



A metacognitive approach to writing



understand how much to write and what to include. Other barriers to writing include spelling, sequencing ideas, grammar and remembering their ideas long enough to record them. The time, effort and lack of awareness make proofreading a challenging conclusion to the process.

- Check understanding of the task.
- Use collaborative learning (see <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit/collaborative-learning>).
- Use ICT to improve written outcomes, for example voice recognition software or mind mapping software.
- Teach 'questioning the question' approaches, for example isolating the topic area, limiting words and directives.
- Provide a glossary of directives.
- Provide examples and model good practice.
- Break down a writing task into manageable chunks.
- Teach and encourage pupils to plan.
- Encourage a metacognitive approach

at each stage of the process of writing, reflecting, reviewing, monitoring and transferring new learning.

- Reward achievement at each stage of the writing process.
- Give specific feedback at each stage so the pupils know what to repeat or improve.
- Provide written and verbal feedback.
- Use alternatives to written outcomes.
- Improve proofreading by:
 - building in proofreading time in lessons
 - using a 'buddying' system
 - teaching and modelling strategies during lessons
 - providing proofreading checklists
 - encouraging pupils to read work aloud
 - leaving time between writing and proofreading
 - encouraging the use of text-to-voice software to highlight errors
 - rewarding improvements.

Strategies to support working memory difficulties

A working memory deficit will impair a pupil's ability to engage in the lesson and to make progress. Research has consistently demonstrated the adverse academic consequences for pupils with a weak working memory. Teachers can reduce these difficulties by using the following strategies:

- Teach using an integrated multi-sensory approach throughout the lesson.
- Revisit previous learning at the beginning of the lesson, allowing pupils to recall and make associations with new learning.
- Give an overview of the lesson so the pupils can see the outcome and make sense of the content.
- Revisit learning at regular intervals throughout the lesson.
- 'Chunk' the information being taught and check understanding.
- Use a step-by-step approach to complete a task.
- Explain the steps and use pictures where needed.
- When giving instructions, limit the number, repeat them and provide notes and a checklist.
- Use simple, concise sentences.
- Omit unnecessary words so that the instruction is succinct.
- Where possible, use alternative words and give explanations of key words.
- Consider the pace of your delivery – speak more slowly if necessary.
- Use peer discussion to facilitate overlearning.

- Use songs, limericks and rap to aid memorising.
- Allow time for the pupils to process the information and answer.
- Allow pupils to work collaboratively.
- Reduce anxiety – don't put pupils on the spot.
- Ensure that the tasks are relevant to the learning and eliminate those that will interfere with the learning, such as copying, or writing the date.
- When pupils are on task, avoid interrupting their learning.
- Summarise at the end of the lesson and say what the next lesson will be about.
- Allow pupils to set reminders on mobile phones or laptops.
- Know the working memory span of your pupils.

Study skills

Pupils need to develop a metacognitive approach to their learning, drawing from a variety of strategies. Developing metacognition promotes active learners who take personal responsibility for their learning and independence. They should be aware of their own learning style and techniques for how to learn effectively in order to monitor their approach. Develop pupil awareness of their preferred learning styles:

- Teach a variety of learning style approaches.
- Encourage taking responsibility for their learning.
- Teach multi-sensory approaches to learning.
- Develop strategies to aid memory,



such as making associations or using mnemonics.

- Teach a variety of recording methods, such as audio recordings or mind mapping.
- Develop a cross-curricular personalised learning styles dictionary.
- Teach organisational skills explicitly.
- Teach them to prioritise what is important and urgent and what can wait.
- Encourage independence via the use of diaries, Post-it notes and checklists.
- Suggest quiet background music without lyrics.
- Encourage 'brain breaks'.
- Establish a buddy who can give them information if they are absent.
- Help pupils to understand the importance of overlearning to embed learning fully. Pupils with dyslexia need to revisit learning more often to reach a level of automaticity in their learning.

Self-esteem

Pupils with dyslexia will have emotional responses to their difficulties. These can include embarrassment, low self-esteem, frustration and anger, which will cause additional barriers to learning. Making the reasonable adjustments suggested in this guide will help to create an environment where pupils feel secure and confident to take risks and increase their learning potential. Raising whole-school awareness of dyslexia, including identifying the strengths that many dyslexic people have, can create a positive ethos in school. Dyslexic pupils can be creative, artistic, good at sport, with excellent problem-solving and reasoning skills.

Increase self-esteem and motivate learning by:

- celebrating diversity across the school
- promoting a broader view of



intelligence, for example Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

- giving pupils opportunities to demonstrate their strengths
- teaching about successful dyslexics such as Einstein, Richard Branson and Jamie Oliver
- using criticism sensitively and constructively
- never putting pupils 'on the spot'.

Strategic planning

Person-centred planning places children and young people at the heart of the system. How the specific learning needs of a pupil with dyslexia are met should

be influenced by the pupil themselves, and teachers should maintain a flexible approach, recognising that a well-founded, structured, cumulative multi-sensory approach may not work for all pupils.

In a good intervention:

- pupils should be in small groups or one to one
- teaching should be structured, cumulative and multi-sensory
- the delivery should be confident, effective and consistent
- the pupil governs the pace of delivery
- the pupil's learning style is taken into account
- the specific needs of the learner are met
- the session is manageable for the school, teacher and learner and it is delivered at regular intervals
- skills are transferred to the classroom
- progress is reviewed at regular intervals
- the pupil's progress is tracked
- the pupil enjoys the learning and feels motivated
- confidence and self-esteem are improved.

Informed decisions on suitable interventions can be made using *What Works for pupils with literacy difficulties? The effectiveness of intervention schemes* by Greg Brooks. This research report provides clear and analytical evidence for schools on the effectiveness of literacy schemes that are available in the UK. Schools should also consider their own individual contexts in choosing an appropriate intervention. The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust has a similar resource.

Engaging parents and carers

The Code of Practice highlights the key involvement of parents and carers. Their views and wishes are recognised in all aspects of the decision-making process. Local authorities must provide them with clear and accurate information, advice and support in relation to SEND.

Schools have an important role to play in supporting parents to navigate the local offer and access additional support outside school. Ensure that information is easily accessible so that parents can find additional advice. For example:

Ideas for engaging parents and carers

- **Develop a transition package from primary to secondary, involving parents.**
- **Demonstrate that the school has a dyslexia-friendly ethos with a clear assessment structure linked to the demands of the secondary curriculum.**
- **Hold parent information evenings raising awareness of dyslexia and how to support pupils at home, as well as recognising the possible gifts and talents of these children.**
- **Hold a parent workshop with the class teacher or senior management team, sharing information and inviting discussion about developments in the class/school.**
- **Invite parents to attend a dyslexia-friendly lesson (when class teachers feel that practice is firmly established).**

- Parent carer forums – local groups of parents and carers of children with SEND who work alongside local authorities, education and health services to ensure that the services they provide meet the needs of children and their families.
- The Information, Advice and Support Services Network – provides information, advice and support to disabled children and young people, and those with SEN, and their parents.
- Associations such as Dyslexia Action, the British Dyslexia Association and the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust.

The needs of school staff

The focus on literacy in the Ofsted inspection framework draws attention to every teacher being a teacher of literacy. When it comes to reading and spelling, subject-specialist secondary teachers may not have the level of expertise to support the teaching and learning needs of pupils with dyslexia. Consider the following questions:

- What arrangements are in place in your school to ensure that all teachers are informed about the current literacy levels and needs of the pupils they teach?
- With the support of both literacy leaders and SENCO, how are all staff kept fully informed to be able to identify when a pupil shows signs of struggling with literacy across the curriculum?
- Do all staff apply a consistent response across the school to intervene and offer appropriate support and monitor the

effectiveness of these arrangements, reporting regularly on pupil progress?

With the introduction of the new SEND Code of Practice, all teachers are responsible and accountable for the progress and development of the pupils in their class.

SENCOs should work with the senior leadership team, to ensure that:

- all staff have an understanding of dyslexia and know how to meet a dyslexic pupil's learning needs
- teachers are aware of their role in the process of identifying pupils who may have dyslexia
- consistent, inclusive practice is maintained in all departments for pupils with dyslexia
- sufficient, detailed progress tracking ensures that pupils are making the expected progress, or alternative approaches are implemented
- staff are informed of new and revised approaches to meet the dyslexic pupil's learning needs.

The Literacy and Dyslexia-SpLD Professional Development Framework is a free online tool that contains a wealth of resources, knowledge and skills required by teachers of dyslexic learners. The framework was commissioned by the Department for Education and developed by the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust in consultation with a wide number of stakeholders.

Useful resources, websites and training providers

Resources and websites

Moving English forward, Ofsted (2012) – www.ofsted.gov.uk

Removing barriers to literacy, Ofsted (2011) – www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Effective Role of the SENCO, nasen information sheet 1 – www.nasen.org.uk/uploads/publications/66.doc

What works for pupils with literacy difficulties? The effectiveness of intervention schemes by Greg Brooks (2007) – www.interventionsforliteracy.org.uk/assets/documents/Greg-Brooks.pdf

Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties, The Rose Report (2009) <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14790/1/00659-2009DOM-EN.pdf>

No to Failure Report 2009 – www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk/2/about-us/8/history

The Sutton Trust EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit – <http://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/toolkit>

Visual disturbance – <http://irlen.com>

Screening, assessment and intervention software – www.lucid-research.com

DFES (2007) *Letters and Sounds* – www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DFES-00281-2007

Training providers

Understanding and Supporting Learning – www.us-l.co.uk

British Dyslexia Association – www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

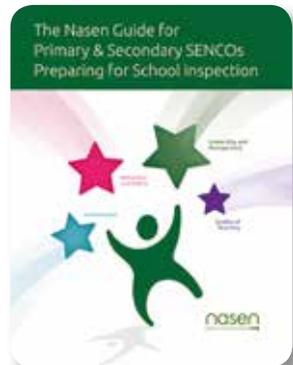
The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust – www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk

Dyslexia Action – <http://dyslexiaaction.org.uk>

The Nasen Guide for Primary & Secondary SENCOs Preparing for School Inspection

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