

## Supporting pupils with dyslexia

- ☛ Introduction
- ☛ Need-to-know facts
- ☛ Legal duties
- ☛ Literacy and dyslexia
- ☛ The Simple View of Reading
- ☛ Literacy Areas of Focus
- ☛ Support strategies
- ☛ Bibliography

### Introduction

Dyslexia is defined by national charity Dyslexia Action as “a specific learning difficulty that primarily affects the ability to learn to read and spell. It often runs in families and stems from a difficulty in processing the sounds in words”. There is strong evidence to suggest that dyslexia is a genetic neurological condition, as the genes associated with language processing abilities are affected.

This document outlines the typical features of dyslexia, offers guidance on legal duties associated with the condition, and provides educational approaches to improving the literacy skills of pupils with dyslexia, as well as a range of support strategies.

### Need-to-know facts

- Dyslexia affects a child’s ability to learn to read and spell, but is not linked to general intelligence.
- It includes difficulties in processing the sounds of words, making it hard to understand phonics; however, visual problems, such as short or long sightedness are unrelated.
- It can sometimes be associated with other types of difficulties, such as maths or coordination skills.
- Short-term memory and the speed of recalling names can be affected.
- The severity of the condition can vary depending on other strengths or difficulties experienced, and the kind of support offered, particularly within school and at home.
- People with dyslexia often display strengths in reasoning skills and are drawn towards visual/creative fields.
- Dyslexia can be associated with other specific learning difficulties, such as dyspraxia, attention deficit disorder and dyscalculia.

### Legal duties

Dyslexia is recognised as a “protected characteristic” under section 6 (1) (a) and (b) of the Equality Act 2010, meaning that educational establishments have a legal

responsibility to make “reasonable adjustments” to ensure that pupils with dyslexia are not disadvantaged compared to their peers.

Additionally, dyslexia is identified in the ‘Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years’, which states:

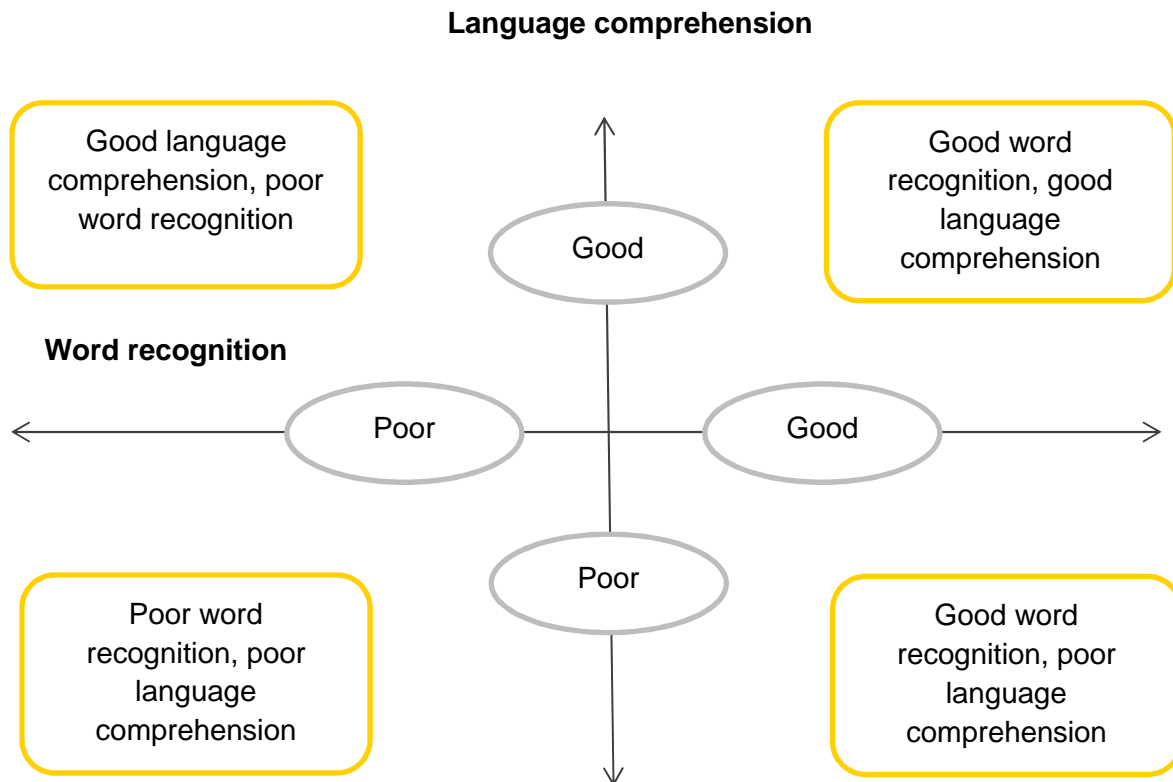
- “Support for learning difficulties may be required when children and young people learn at a slower pace than their peers, even with appropriate differentiation.”
- “Specific learning difficulties affect one or more specific aspects of learning. This encompasses a range of conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia.”

## Literacy and dyslexia

Former Ofsted Chief Inspector and SEND specialist Sir Jim Rose recommends the literacy framework ‘The Simple View of Reading’ (SVR). Constructed by academics Philip Gough and William Tunmer in 1986, and reinterpreted since, the SVR approach acknowledges that the process of reading is comprised of two inter-dependent processes – **word recognition** protocols and **language comprehension** procedures.

To develop pupils’ literacy skills, it is vital that teachers understand which of the two processes they want to focus on improving at any given moment.

## The Simple View of Reading



The SVR approach suggests that pupils with dyslexia will often display problems which are typical of those on the left side of the diagram. As research suggests that recognising the sounds that correspond with letters and words is the primary issue for children with dyslexia, teachers must ensure that pupils with dyslexia are given additional time and support to recognise the links between the sounds of words, their visual representation and what they mean.

## Literacy areas of focus

According to Professor Maryanne Wolf, “dyslexia is a different brain organisation that needs different teaching methods. It is never the fault of the child, but rather the responsibility of us who teach to find the methods that work for the child”. With this in mind, it is critical to understand the different factors associated with reading that affect pupils with dyslexia.

**Phoneme awareness:** The English language is built upon 44 sounds, called phonemes, which can be represented by different letters. What makes English particularly tricky for pupils with dyslexia is that some letters can represent different phonemes. As multiple areas of the brain work together to contribute to an understanding of these phonemes, many children with dyslexia have problems with matching phonemes to their corresponding letters.

**Fluency:** Some pupils can understand phonemes, but can't pair them with the associated letters due to problems with the speed of processing the information. Sometimes, the right hemisphere of the brain can try to perform the functions of the left hemisphere, meaning that there can be a delay and the reading process or 'circuit' is not completed easily, resulting in fluency problems.

**Comprehension:** Once a pupil has made connections between letters and sounds, and can process words in a reasonable time scale, then the work of linking words to meanings and grammatical functions begins. Often, problems at this stage are not diagnosed until a child is older, when the focus shifts from learning to read, to reading to learn. Some pupils with dyslexia can read words, but show signs of significant struggle. Many of these children are sparky and intelligent, and may have coped by memorising words, but have never gained enough fluency to understand what they are reading.

## Support strategies

### Classroom environment

- Ensure that all pupils can see your face clearly, and vice versa.
- Consider seating pupils with dyslexia near to the front of the class, with a close friend to act as a 'buddy'.
- Reduce distractions, e.g. shut doors to reduce noise and try to maintain a cool, but not chilly room temperature.
- Check that all pupils have enough personal space at their desk to aid their ability to focus.

### Giving instructions

- At the beginning of the lesson, give an overview of what will be covered.

- Break instructions down into clear, simple steps and give no more than three pieces of information at a time.
- Repeat instructions as necessary, in a friendly, patient manner.
- Check pupils understand by asking them to explain what has been said.
- Use connectives to signpost instructions, e.g. 'firstly', 'secondly', 'next' and 'finally'.
- Display key words on the board or somewhere prominent, and ensure they are visible for the whole lesson.
- Use visual prompts to make explanations clear and handouts where necessary.
- Develop clear routines for noting down homework information – give pupils plenty of time to write down information and check that it has been recorded correctly.

### **Written material**

- Reduce the glare of black text on white paper by printing handouts on pastel-coloured paper or by using a pastel coloured overlay over white paper.
- Provide 'reading rulers' for pupils who find that text 'jumps around' on the page.
- Choose rounded, sans serif fonts, such as Arial, Verdana, Helvetica or Comic Sans.
- Use a minimum font size of 12 or 14 and avoid justifying text, so there is a ragged right margin. This can help pupils to follow the lines of text with their finger when reading.
- Double-line spacing and a line between paragraphs will make text easier to read.
- Put headings and important information in bold text or highlight, to make them easier to scan.
- Present information simply, using bullet points, images or diagrams when possible.
- 'Chunk' numbers to make them easy to remember and/or copy, e.g. 864 126 321.

### **Spelling and handwriting**

- Teach vocabulary associated with words, such as vowels, consonants, syllables, suffixes, prefixes and homophones (words that sound the same, but are spelled differently), to aid learning.
- Help pupils to learn the spelling of tricky words by using amusing mnemonics.
- Encourage pupils to spell words aloud, allowing time for repetition or revision of learning.
- Use multi-sensory methods to reinforce letter writing, e.g. interactive whiteboards, iPads, spelling/writing apps.
- Teach primary pupils how to write using cursive script if possible, as it can aid the 'physical memory' of each letter. The continuous flow of writing also helps to improve handwriting speed and pupils are less likely to reverse letters such as 'b' and 'd'.
- Consider the use of rubber pen grips or typing of written work for pupils with severe writing difficulties.

### **Confidence building**

- Mark work on content where there is a large amount of incorrect information.
- Rather than crossing work, just tick what is correct, then follow up misconceptions with pupil.

- Do not draw attention to every spelling error – instead, ‘pattern mark’ work to focus on specific types of spelling errors.
- Do not minimise difficulties – instead, help pupils to recognise, understand and tackle problems.
- Set achievable targets, with clear steps to help pupils meet them.
- Encourage independent learning, nurture strengths and praise effort rather than ability. Where at all possible, make praise specific.

### **Study strategies**

- Encourage the use of highlighters to select key information from key texts.
- Use writing frames to help pupils organise their ideas and structure written work.
- Create a short checklist of error patterns for pupils to look out for, such as spelling errors, commas, full-stops, capital letters and apostrophes.
- Give pupils time to organise equipment at the beginning of the lesson, and to clear away at the end.
- Allow pupils enough ‘thinking time’ to process any information or instructions.
- Never demand a complete re-write of work – this would be extremely demoralising for a pupil with dyslexia.

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### **Bibliography**

DfE (2015) ‘Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years’, pg. 97-98

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The Equality Act 2010, section 6 (1) (a) and (b)