

Annex 6

Practical guidance: 'What Works' for children with literacy and dyslexic difficulties who are also experiencing wider difficulties

Listed below are a number of things found to help with some of the wider difficulties sometimes experienced by children with literacy and dyslexic difficulties. These have been gleaned, for example, from the Inclusion Development Programme and from experienced teachers during the course of the review. This material is not exhaustive.

Helping children understand complex instructions

Chunking - one instruction at a time

1. If you have a lot of information or instructions to give, break it down into shorter 'chunks' of language, pausing after each one. A long 'block' of spoken language can be difficult to process in one go.

Re-ordering

2. Say things in the order you want them to be done. So, instead of 'Before you write your homework down, clear away the equipment' say, 'Clear away the equipment. Then write down your homework.'

Cut down the amount you say

3. Studies have shown that in some classrooms adults talk for up to 90% of the time. For a young person with dyslexia or SLCN, this can feel overwhelming. Think about structuring lessons and activities so there is a mixture of activity-type.

Slow down

4. Even slowing down your talking a bit means that students will give longer responses, and will say more. This doesn't mean that you have to start talking in a sing-song voice!

Give visual support: use gesture, thinking/concept maps, demonstrating, quick sketches

5. Visual support can take many different forms. Young people with dyslexia and SLCN find information easier to understand and process if it is supplemented by something with a strong visual impact. This could be a natural gesture; facial expression; use of pictures; video; quick drawings on the whiteboard; using the interactive whiteboard; linking to the Internet; using real objects; demonstrating or showing instead of telling; using mind maps on the board.

Avoid idioms, sarcasm, double meanings

6. We all use phrases such as 'off you go' or 'get your thinking caps on', or use tone of voice to show meaning 'Oh that's just great!', but these can be really difficult for young people with dyslexia and SLCN who may easily take them literally or get the wrong end of the stick (there's another one!). Be aware of times when you use language that is inferential or may have a double

meaning – try to make sure you use something else or explain carefully.

Simplify the grammar

7. We often use a complex sentence when a simpler one would do just as well. Some sentences are very difficult for young people with dyslexia and SLCN to understand such as passive tense, for example 'Show me who was the boy who was pushed', or embedded phrases, for example 'Put the one you thought it was next to the beaker that boiled'. Try to simplify your sentences.

Pausing after you have asked a question

8. We know that adults often pause far too briefly when they have asked a question before switching from one child to another, or jumping in with another question. Young people with dyslexia SLCN often need more 'processing time' to get their thoughts together and formulate a response. Waiting longer for a response can greatly help these students to engage and contribute. Sometimes this isn't possible, but there are often times when you can wait – it doesn't have to be empty space, be aware of strategies for making it feel more natural, for example, ask a question and say you're coming back for the answer, or turn and write something on the board.

Commenting

9. For pupils with dyslexia and SLCN, commenting on what they are doing, and pausing, rather than asking questions, encourages dialogue and supports their thinking and learning, for example 'So, plants need light and water to grow...'/ 'I wonder what would happen if ...'

Note taking

There are a number of ways to structure note taking – the key word being 'structure'.

The first rule is to be prepared. Students need to:

- make sure they have completed any background reading or preparation before the lesson and have made a note of any important questions they have to be aware of;
- use either a linear or patterned format to note the main points as key words and phrases;
- use abbreviations wherever possible;
- leave out the little words such as 'the', 'is', 'to', but make sure they remember that 'no' and 'not' are important words;
- record numbers, names, dates and titles;
- write definitions carefully;
- record the teacher's conclusions clearly and concisely;
- mark any points not understood;
- copy diagrams carefully;
- have a friend or classmate who will share their notes or use a piece of carbon paper to provide a second set.

Organising notes

If making linear notes the student should:

- use wide-lined A4 paper;
- leave wide margins on both edges of the sheets or divide the page lengthways and only write on two-thirds;
- leave gaps for additions or corrections;
- use coloured pens and highlighters;
- use headings and subheadings, marking subsections with letters or numbers.

When using patterned notes or spidergrams:

- use plain, coloured paper in a landscape position;
- make use of coloured pens.

For both kinds of notes:

- write only on one side of each page so that extra pages can be inserted later, for example observations of practical work, for additional reading or own thoughts;
- the aim should be to have one set of notes that ties together all the aspects of a particular topic;
- use particular colours of paper, folders or dividers for different subjects/topics;
- after the session, notes may need organising or reorganising perhaps by sorting them into: Main point › Supporting points › Summary.

Useful Strategies

Children can be helped to better organise their tasks if they are taught how to:

- skim and scan a page;
- sort the information;
- determine priorities;
- make considered judgements.

For most children putting printed information into their own words, rather than just copying it, is a highly challenging task. Therefore the more 'scaffolding' that can be provided for them, the better they will respond to this type of task.