

What is Dyslexia? - A definition of dyslexia

Sir Jim Rose, in his report on dyslexia published in 2009, worked with an expert advisory group who all agreed on six points:

- 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. Current research points to difficulties in the ability to identify and manipulate the sounds in words (phonological awareness); the ability to retain an ordered sequence of verbal material (verbal memory) and the ability to quickly process familiar verbal information such as letters and digits (verbal processing speed).
- Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.
- 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. ‘Well-founded’ intervention is where research studies have convincingly demonstrated accelerated progress.
- Dyslexia is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points. Dyslexic difficulties vary from mild to severe with no clear boundaries. Until recently, a child was considered to have or not to have dyslexia. It is now recognised that there is no sharp dividing line between having a learning difficulty such as dyslexia and not having it.
- 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. Some pupils may have co-occurring difficulties. These may arise from the same weaknesses that are characteristic features of dyslexia. There can also be other additional areas of difficulty that are not directly connected with dyslexia.

Many children with dyslexia also have problems with concentration, attention, sometimes with handwriting and co-ordination but these are not part of dyslexia itself, they're things that often go along with it and the Rose report is very clear in emphasising that. We know what dyslexia is; it's primarily this difficulty with language and phonology, but around that often come these additional co-occurring difficulties.

Pupils with dyslexia need to be explicitly taught the same basic principles of reading and spelling as all learners. They can be taught to read but it takes longer and needs continuing and systematic approaches (daily practice). Research evidence shows that it's best to intervene as early as possible.

Strategies we offer in our provision at COPASS

Good support for pupils with dyslexic difficulties requires a whole-school approach which covers:

- the teaching of reading and spelling through systematic coverage of the complete set of grapheme-phoneme correspondences in a cumulative sequence, with built-in opportunities for repetition and over-learning, and for applying new knowledge and skills to reading and spelling tasks.
- we use ‘Phonics Bug’ synthetic phonics daily intervention
- the monitoring of progress
- evidence-based reading and spelling intervention
- consistent adoption of agreed adaptations to practice

- the sharing of information
- all pupils receive teaching and support that is appropriate to their ability.

Explicit teaching

Pupils with dyslexic difficulties continue to need explicit teaching in small steps that constantly check whether pupils have retained and can apply what they have been taught. Teaching is:

- **sequential:** there is a prescribed sequence of learning targets that are presented in small steps
- **cumulative:** new learning builds on what has already been learnt so that previous learning receives further practice
- **repetitive to the point of ‘over-learning’:** continued repetition and checking ensures that learning is retained in long-term memory
- **multi-sensory:** seeing, saying and writing a word repeatedly to fix it in memory.
- Within our classrooms, we moved away from having decorative celebration boards and we have working walls to show the learning progression throughout a unit of work and as students can see how things could be recorded.
- Students are encouraged to use ICT to record their work
- Some students may use coloured papers and overlays for their reading
- A range of different dictionaries and word banks are available for everybody in the class
- New words or a new set of key vocabulary are introduced for science themes and topic based work. Key word vocabulary is supported visually through word mats or word walls.
- Specific and dedicated decoding and comprehension strategies are taught
- ICT is used to provide access to information in forms that involve less or no reading (e.g. visual/audio) and a means of recording information without spelling disrupting fluency (e.g. speech converters or spell-checkers)
- specific reading and spelling support (e.g. computerised systematic phonics programmes to practice word-reading and spelling skills, i-pads and dyslexia apps).
- Interactive whiteboards - we limit the number of words that are displayed on the whiteboard at any one time, so instead of a student having to be faced with a poem in its entirety, or several paragraphs of text, students are presented with smaller sections
- bullet points so that the decoding, the comprehending and then understanding of the task becomes a simpler process and they are not over-faced with the amount of language that they have to get through
- Activities from occupational therapy ‘Paston pack’ which help develop working memory, organisation, sequencing and motor skills for writing