



What is Dyslexia?

Put very simply, dyslexia is a type of specific learning difficulty involving processing, which affects the ease with which an individual can develop fluent and accurate literacy skills. Dyslexia is very common. Of those who are affected, only a small percentage have severe difficulties. Literacy involves a wide range of complex mental processes, but individual profiles vary widely and therefore the way they are affected also varies.

There are lots of definitions of dyslexia, because it is a complex subject, but the most commonly accepted one in the UK is this, from the Rose Report 'Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties' (2009), which states that:

- 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 to well founded interventions.

You can find out more about what dyslexia is here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zafiGBrFkRM>

Dyslexia can be viewed very negatively, but people with Dyslexia can also be creative thinkers and have strengths which must not be overlooked. Dyslexia can make some tasks more challenging, but it should not become a person's defining feature. Look at this powerful video to see more.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_qGJ9svUbM

You can find a useful guide to Dyslexia for parents and children here.

<http://www.parentchampions.org.uk/resources/understanding-dyslexia-booklet/>

How is Dyslexia identified?

Dyslexia must be identified by either a specialist teacher who has additional, nationally recognised qualifications for this purpose, or sometimes by an educational psychologist. (It is not a medical condition, so there is no medical diagnosis.)

However, before this stage much can be done. In a Dyslexia Friendly School, all teachers are trained to recognise learning behaviours that might be indicating a potential literacy difficulty or dyslexia. They also know what actions to take in the first instance to try to overcome the difficulties. If these don't work they will refer to the SENCO for further advice, and if necessary some additional support and intervention will be put into place. The child's progress is monitored to see how they respond to this. Meanwhile other potential factors are considered – for example we might ask you to take your child to an optician to eliminate the possibility of a problem with their eyesight.

If this support is not enough a formal assessment will be considered, with your consent. At Rode & Norton St Philip School Federation, the SENCO has the required additional qualifications to complete this assessment and identify Dyslexia.

The formal assessment involves the completion of a range of standardised tests, which provide a learning profile that can be looked at in conjunction with information gathered previously. Based on this, further provision is then planned, and will usually be written up as a Learning Plan, agreed in discussion with parents.

Learning support for pupils with dyslexia and literacy difficulties includes two strands:

1. Action to minimise the barriers to learning in the classroom, so that children can access the curriculum at a level appropriate to their understanding and development. This includes the use of particular teaching strategies and resources which are likely to be supportive. (It does not include full time 1:1 support in class because strong evidence from research shows that this can often become more of a barrier than a help for children, but it may include targeted adult support for some tasks if that is appropriate.)
2. Specific intervention to target the learning difficulty. This takes the form of additional interventions, which can be delivered in small groups, or in some cases, individually. The interventions we use at Rode and Norton St Philip School Federation are chosen because they have a proven record of success, but we also constantly check that they are working for individual pupils and adjust them as necessary.

What if the assessment does not identify Dyslexia?

It is important to recognise that children develop at very different rates and come to school with different background experiences, both of which can affect the speed with which they acquire literacy. Sometimes what appears initially as a difficulty improves as children mature.

An assessment may indicate that the underlying skills are emerging, meaning that identification of dyslexia is not appropriate, or it may be less clear cut. Sometimes the assessment may identify that a child has, for example, poor working memory, but other characteristics of dyslexia are not present. In this case, Dyslexia would not usually be identified.

Even if dyslexia is not identified, action will be taken to provide appropriate support for children if specific difficulties are highlighted.

Does it matter whether my child is described as having Dyslexia or not?

Not all parents like the idea of having their young child labelled as dyslexic, and it is not essential.

The primary concern for schools and teachers is that if a child is having difficulties, the potential sources of that difficulty are identified as early as possible and action is taken to address them. This should happen regardless of the cause of the problem, or the label used to describe it.

However, an assessment can have benefits because it gives a more detailed picture of the child's learning needs, enabling better targeting of the provision made for them. It also assists in tracking their needs over time (these may change as the demands of the curriculum develop, when reassessment might be necessary). The identification of Dyslexia may best be regarded as a product of the process of assessment, rather than the main reason for doing it.

How can we help at home?

Maintaining self confidence and self esteem is a crucial factor for success.

- Make sure you notice and praise what they are good at, and provide them with opportunities to develop skills and interests where they can shine.
- Doing lots and lots of additional practice at home on the things they are finding difficult can become counter productive. Keep it short. Learning is often more tiring for them, and when it is always difficult, it can lead to loss of motivation and self esteem.
- However, this does not mean that practice at home is unimportant. There are things you can do at home that will really help children with their learning.

Follow this link for some top tips on reading and spelling with your child, including some video clips of how to help.

<http://www.parentchampions.org.uk/resources/top-tips-on-reading-handwriting-spelling-memory-and-organisation/>

