

Succeeding with SEND series



Focus on Dyslexia Q&A



All answers were provided by Helen Boden, who lead our [Focus on Dyslexia video](#).

Helen Boden CEO of the British Dyslexia Association

With a background in education and training since 1990 and a qualified specialist dyslexia teacher, Helen began work for the BDA in 2002 and has been with the organisation for 15 of the last 17 years.

After running the organisation's training department, Helen became CEO in March 2018, with a focus on empowering dyslexics through lobbying, raising awareness, training and direct support.

In your experience what are the most effective ways to support dyslexic students in the classroom?

This would really depend on the needs of the individual, so it's hard to say. The key I think is to make good use of differentiation and be really clear in what you want the individual to learn, try not to clutter this with a long wish list of other things you are hoping to get or move the goal posts along the way. Then think about how they can show that they have learnt it.

We are sometimes a bit narrow minded in the way that we judge whether learning has taken place, so providing alternative assessment methodologies can be helpful, if appropriate. It's really important to ensure that an individual is successful, and that this success is quickly achieved, otherwise they become rapidly demotivated. Also breaking big tasks into bite size pieces is helpful. The final one is not to be too greedy and expect too much, it is often better to achieve a smaller good quality piece of work than a big one and recognise the effort that has gone into a piece of work may be far greater than is evidenced by the piece of work itself, so recognise the effort and journey to achieving the result, as well as the end result. There are lots of hints and tips in our publication *The Dyslexia Friendly Schools Good Practise Guide* available [here](#).

What support is available to dyslexic students taking formal exams?

This would depend on the type of exam and who the awarding body is.

For GCSEs & A Levels, the JCQ provide guidance on what access arrangements are available [here](#). But in order to have access arrangements for these exams you would have to have an initial assessment (this is not a diagnostic assessment and is carried out at the centre where you were going to take the exams).

This assessment would identify whether or not you meet the eligibility criteria set by JCQ.

For the JCQ, whatever access arrangements you might require such as additional time/reader/scribe, etc, would depend on whether you have had these reasonable adjustments as part of your normal way of working for the past 2 years. For some access arrangements such as additional rest breaks, use of a screen reader, etc. these are at the discretion of the examination centre, but they would still need to be your normal way of working.

For other exams, such as professional exams, you would need to check with the awarding body what their guidance is with regards to what evidence you would need to supply and also what the process is for applying for them.

How can we do more to support and raise the profile around the mental health of young children with dyslexia, whose frustration can sometimes lead to self-harm and other destructive behaviours?

The BDA recently produced a report on this very subject available [here](#). This is something that the BDA is campaigning on as part of our "Cost of Unsupported Dyslexia" work. The simple answer is to support the BDA, as without your support and funding we cannot do what we do to raise awareness of these issues and lobby for policy changes to improve the prospects for dyslexic children in education.

The difficulties faced by young people who have dyslexia seems to vary. Are there more effective ways to firstly assess young people, and then to support them in the classroom (and beyond) so that they don't feel that they are 'stupid' or 'just don't get it'?

Each dyslexic is likely to be different, just as all individuals are different from one another. For assessment, there are lots of screening tools that are effective although these won't provide a diagnosis, but they can be a useful starting point. We have a really good publication for support in the classroom with lots of ideas. This is The Dyslexia Friendly Schools Good Practise Guide available [here](#).

One of the BDA's big campaigns at the moment is to push for a specialist teacher to be available in every school. This sits expertise at the front line and is a resource to support both learners and teaching staff. Our recent [APPG report highlights](#) why this is so important. It is relatively straightforward to [train to become a specialist teacher](#) through the BDA.

Why does enlarged print seem to help some pupils with dyslexia? Is it fair to request enlarged text for public exams as you would a pupil with visual impairment?

Sometimes there are visual processing issues associated or co-occurring alongside dyslexia or it could be that the increased size differentiates the words and the spaces between the words more clearly. If this was the individual's normal way of working, then it would be possible for an exam paper to be produced in this way, provided the request was made to the awarding body in time. In a similar way exam papers can be produced on coloured paper, etc.

Are morning interventions effective for supporting dyslexic students?

A dyslexic's brain often has to work harder than others to process information, particularly language based information. Therefore, it is likely that they will tire more quickly. By the end of the school day they may simply be exhausted and fatigued, so find challenging work more difficult. That said everyone has a different working pattern of concentration across the day so finding out when an individual

works best is likely to make any intervention more effective, but this might not necessarily be mornings for some people. So it's always worth monitoring when the best periods of concentration happen and if possible, timing interventions to coincide with these. Shorter more frequent periods of highly focussed work, interspersed with breaks, are likely to be more effective than longer periods requiring intensive concentration. Remember that dyslexic individuals will also need to practice new skills more frequently so "repetition and over learning" is really important within any intervention programme.

What do you do when everything (such as evidence-based interventions) have failed? Including 1:1 SpLD tuition?

There are some individuals who just appear resistant to interventions. I'm afraid there isn't a magic bullet. The keys to success in my experience are as follows;

- Decide on a programme and stick to it (provided it is sensible or suitable for dyslexic individuals). Often, we can think something isn't working but we just haven't done it consistently enough.
- Deliver the programme as intended, don't be tempted to jump bits. A structured cumulative programme is exactly that and designed to be delivered in that way. Assume nothing, even where the individual appears to be able to do something or already seems to know some things, we often find there are unexpected gaps in their knowledge. The dyslexic brain will often snatch at pieces of information that leaves big holes in the overall learning, even though on the surface it appears that they know it.
- Go as slow as the learner needs you to. We are all too often in a rush and under pressure to show progression. You need to go at the pace of the learner. For example, in some cases this might be that they manage to learn 1 new letter sound a week. If that is their pace, then that's the pace you go. Often programmes go too quickly and introduce too many new things at the same time.
- Allow lots and lots and lots of time for over learning and repetition. Don't move on before something is automatic. Short bursts of daily, quality, practice of new learning is really important.
- Ensure whatever you are doing is truly multisensory – whatever you are trying to teach ask yourself can they "see it, hear it, say it and write it" at every point.
- Ensure that each learning step builds on the previous so that its cumulative. This way they are constantly revisiting the previous learning.
- Make it fun – the human mind has an extraordinary ability to remember the unusual, or funny, or exceptional. The more hooks you can hang their learning on the more likely it will be remembered and absorbed.

- Try and tap into the learner's own interests and connect the learning to these, if at all possible. Again, making the learning relevant makes it more enticing to the individual and therefore more engaging and memorable.
- Take heart from the fact that most individuals will get there, especially for reading, in the end. Spelling is more problematic. But use assistive technology to get around difficulties so that the individual can express their ideas and access the written word without being hindered by literacy difficulties. Find their interest and encourage them to develop and explore this (I once taught someone to read by entirely driving their desire to pass scuba diving exams!)
- Develop your own skills through training or attending [conferences](#).
- If using a tutor make sure that they are suitably qualified such as level 7 Dyslexia Specialist Teacher Qualification and professional membership such as AMBDA, as this will ensure that they keep up to date with latest thinking and practice through CPD.
- Don't give up!

How can I feedback after a screening an individual and develop on their results?

This would really depend on what the screening tool is telling you. I'm afraid this is impossible to answer without knowing what tool you have used and what the profile showed. To develop on the results in terms of finding out if it is definitely dyslexia then the only way of doing this would be through a full diagnostic assessment.

View our Dyslexia resources