

Developing a Whole-School Policy on Dyslexia

Schools should have policies on dyslexia including policies on staff development, classroom based assessment, ICT and curriculum materials focussing on differentiation, all of which can help facilitate access to the full curriculum for pupils with dyslexia.

Successful inclusion relies on absolute respect for the needs of the individual, devising support structures that intrude as little as possible so that the needs of the majority are not compromised. It also needs to take place within a strong and highly effective pastoral system.

The combination of pastoral care and special needs expertise is the key to the successful inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream educational settings.

A successful inclusion programme provides the right to a normal life for all members of the school community. It is no more and no less than should be expected by a civilized society. However, the corollary of this is that pupils with special needs have responsibilities as well. They have to work at increasing independence in a supportive environment. This is their opportunity to acquire vital survival skills and arrive at genuine ambitions and expectations for themselves. This realistic goal setting and, perhaps more importantly, a knowledge of what is required to achieve those goals is a vital step if they are to achieve their potential and take their part as full members of society.

This realism tempered with humanity is an honest way to respect the rights of individuals with special needs. Full mainstream inclusion must be possible for all those capable of living independent lives, albeit with additional support and resources. Pupils who will never live independently provide a very different challenge for us all. Success for special needs pupils in a mainstream setting gains them respect from their peers and facilitates the creation of a positive self-image.

A workable Inclusion policy depends on a whole-school commitment to do all that can be done for all pupils.

Integration or Inclusion?

It is initially of vital importance to establish the fundamental difference between Integration and Inclusion. Integration crucially implies that the pupil adapts to the school whereas in Inclusion the two must move towards each other.

A successful inclusive school must, above all, provide a caring and trusting environment. Responsibility for this cannot fall entirely upon the shoulders of the Special Needs Department. Rather the impetus should be provided by the whole school. Without this total involvement, Inclusion,

perhaps more than any other policy simply cannot survive or develop. It is dependent on personality, commitment, care and trust.

It is about child-centred education for life in the wider world beyond school and at its core are the skills that are needed to survive and live a happy and complete life within society. It must retain, as its central tenet, the idea of providing the pupils with a sense of self worth and social inclusion. It is about values, principles and conscience. At its heart lies the provision of a secure environment in which a child can develop, grow, learn and progress; where he/she can experience success and failure, receive praise encouragement and understanding, be reassured, receive protection and stability. The policy relies entirely upon the wider ethos of the school and, in this sense, all practical aspects and devices are secondary.

A successful inclusion programme constitutes a genuine attempt to tackle equal opportunities by challenging stereotypes and confronting prejudice. Amongst all pupils, it helps create an awareness of special needs in the context of the familiar rather than something that happens out there, to strange people, in strange places.

It leads to a greater awareness of personal and social responsibility and most importantly fosters a climate of achievement where everybody is expected to tackle everything.

The Hidden Curriculum

Even if the pupil with dyslexia is able to master the standard reading and writing curriculum, her/his success in school can be negatively affected if the 'hidden curriculum' has not been mastered. This 'hidden curriculum' consists of a wide variety of social skills and strategies including teacher-pleasing behaviour, peer interactions, and group dynamics. Pupils with dyslexia may not therefore put themselves forward to participate on school teams or to be in school plays. Teachers have a role in helping such pupils gain confidence in their abilities. They must be given opportunities to succeed.

The teacher should identify the unique social mores in the school and teach these concepts to the pupils with dyslexia.

- The teacher should understand the significant difference between the standard curriculum of school and the 'hidden curriculum'.
- The teacher should identify and master the strategies necessary to identify the 'hidden curriculum' in the school.

The teacher must master specific strategies to make the school and the classroom more 'user-friendly' for pupils with dyslexia.

Dyslexia-Friendly Schools

The term 'dyslexia-friendly' has come into recent use as a description for schools that manage an appropriate level of provision and inclusion for pupils with dyslexia.

A school may be classed 'dyslexia-friendly' if:

- it values the needs of all learners and has a positive view towards pupils with dyslexia
- the management structures of the school provide support with regard to issues of dyslexia

- it provides a systematic and supportive approach to continuing professional development that focuses on dyslexia for all staff
- it has appropriate levels of provision and resources which are deployed effectively
- it has effective early identification, assessment and intervention procedures
- it values and implements working partnerships with parents and pupils

Sample Whole-School Policy Statement

We recognise that some pupils, despite intellectual and other abilities, have unexpected difficulty learning to read and/or to spell and write fluently. These pupils may be described as having dyslexia.

We recognise that some of these pupils have special educational needs; that these needs have to be met to the best of our ability and resources; and that these pupils have the same right of access to the curriculum and to all the activities of the school as all other pupils. We will therefore make the following arrangements to try to ensure that their needs are met.

- We will operate an early identification and monitoring programme to try to ensure that all pupils who are experiencing difficulties with reading and spelling are identified as early in their school career as possible.
- Where necessary we will assess and make provision for the pupil's difficulties within the accepted framework for Special Educational Needs. We will prepare an individualised education plan setting out the provision we propose to make for the pupil and the objectives for that provision.
- If, despite our efforts to ameliorate the pupil's difficulties, it is felt that there is still a noticeable mismatch between a pupil's oral skills (talking and listening) and his/her attainment in reading, spelling and general English skills, we will, following consultation with parents, refer the pupil for assessment by an Educational Psychologist. This assessment will address the need for specialist support.
- Following discussion with the Educational Psychologist we will formulate a revised individualised education plan for each pupil.
- The plan will set out the provision which we can make from within our own resources and the strategies which class teachers can adopt to help the pupil access the curriculum. All teachers who teach the pupil will be made aware of his/her difficulties and will be made aware of the agreed plan and the agreed strategies to help give the pupil access to the printed aspects of the curriculum.
- These strategies will include the use of word banks, personal (illustrated) dictionaries, the use of spellcheckers and other spelling aids. We will try, within the limits of our resources, to promote the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) where appropriate to support learning (e.g., reinforce basic literacy skills, editing and revising text, etc.).
- We will try to be as sensitive as possible to sources of anxiety and embarrassment e.g. being asked to read aloud in class without adequate preparation, being asked to copy large amounts of written material from the board.

- Teachers will take account of the pupil's difficulties when marking work by, for example, concentrating on content. They will also be aware of the need to find alternative ways of assessing progress rather than always through written tests and examinations.
- We will try, as far as is possible within our resources, to make appropriate arrangements for pupils to undertake tests or examinations. This may involve giving the pupil additional time; allowing the questions to be read to him/her; allowing the pupil to use I.C.T.
- Teachers will take account of the pupil's difficulties when setting homework assignments. They will consult with parents and set homework which can be completed by the pupil within a reasonable period of time. Teachers will also try to ensure that assignments set by different teachers are co-ordinated and do not impose an unfair burden on the pupil.
- We are aware that pupils with dyslexia have experienced "failure" and that often their motivation for reading and written work is low. We are conscious of the need to make these tasks as attractive and stimulating as possible and of the need to find ways of raising the pupil's motivation generally. This is particularly important since the nature of their difficulties means that there will need to be a lot of repetition of basic work to ensure that reading vocabulary, spellings etc. are learned and retained.
- We will try to suggest ways in which parents can help us help their child. We believe that parents can contribute a great deal to an educational programme by, for example, reading to their child on a regular basis; participating in paired-reading schemes; hearing their child read every day, making and illustrating personal dictionaries and word-banks; supporting the child while doing homework etc.

N.B. A note could be included in the school policy at post-primary level that any pupil who is eligible for support in state exams e.g. tape recorder, will be given an opportunity (at least one year) to practise using this medium for recording answers)

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