Strategies for Learning and Teaching

In addition to the tips below, please also see 'Understanding Dyslexia - A Guide for Schools' which provides information, practical support and guidance for parents and teachers in relation to supporting and teaching children with dyslexia. These are the outcome of a project implemented by a working group that was established by the Special Education Co-ordination Committee of the North-South Ministerial Council. These resources were originally distributed to schools in 2004 in CD and DVD format.

Click here for an on-line version of the contents of 'Understanding Dyslexia - A Guide for Schools'.

- Recognise the confusion and frustration of the student and avoid situations that increase pressure.
- Do not equate genuine variability of performance with lack of effort.
- Provide support with additional recording mechanisms where appropriate (e.g. appropriate literacy software, charts, diagrams, dictaphones, electronic dictionaries, models, voice recognition software and word processors with spellchecker).
- Employ line trackers and/or coloured overlays as appropriate.
- Provide opportunities for the student to re-learn and over-learn.
- Encourage the process of drafting and redrafting.
- Amend worksheets to make them understandable.
- Provide assistance with elements of the writing process, such as the using of planning sheets and editing checklists.
- Read questions aloud.
- Encourage self-correction.
- Practise memory games.
- Use a structured multi-sensory literacy programme with the student.
- Establish the students’ strengths and their individual learning styles.
- Teach a range of word-attack skills (e.g. contextual cues, look and say, phonics, punctuation and word shapes).
- Use a graded-reading programme that is appropriate to the student’s level of literacy skills as well as his/her interest level.
- Provide supplementary reading material that is below the student’s assessed reading level, which allows the student to read independently (i.e. less than two errors in one hundred words).
- Use a rehearsal-reading system. Instead of calling on students at random to read aloud, assign each student a specific passage a day in advance.
- Start with the student’s free writing when selecting spellings to learn. Target specific spelling patterns that the student requires assistance with as evidenced in the student’s free writing.
- Correct spellings positively and allow students credit for correct letters or sounds in words.
- Employ a number of multi-sensory methods when teaching spellings and consider the use of the strategy of look, copy, trace, picture, cover, write and check selectively.
- Construct logs or diaries of essential words.
Break tasks into small steps and allow adequate time for completion.
Select and highlight most important errors, not all errors – focus on the nature of the errors (quality) rather than the number of errors (quantity).
Teach study skills (e.g. highlighting central points, mind-maps®, mnemonics, etc).
Give regular constructive praise and encouragement and maintain high expectations.
Limit copying from the board. Write in different colours on the blackboard.
Expect students' work to be erratic and inconsistent.
Encourage students to repeat the directions for completing a task.
Use visual cues to help the students to organise themselves.
Acknowledge that extra time is needed by students in order to complete tasks.
Use appropriate computer software to support reading, spelling and writing (e.g. Wordshark®, Numbershark®, etc).
Encourage the use of spelling dictionaries such as ACE Spelling Dictionary® and spellcheckers such as the Franklin®.
Particularly at post-primary level consider the use of some non-printed learning materials such as taped books, recorded classes and curriculum texts on tape.
Remember a student with dyslexia may have great difficulty with figures (e.g. learning tables), reading music or anything which entails interpreting symbols. Learning foreign languages can be particularly difficult.