

Primary Hints and Tips

Handy Hints for Primary School Teachers

We have all come across the situation. A child who is struggling with spelling, writing or reading, or perhaps numeracy. A child who does not progress as quickly as his/her classmates – or worse, does not seem to progress at all. And yet there are obvious inconsistencies; the child clearly has areas of ability as well as weaknesses.

You think the child will improve in time – but you see no change. Then someone mentions dyslexia and you start to wonder. But you tell yourself that children often get over such early difficulties and you hope for the best. Yet you still feel uneasy. This child is different.

So how do you tell if a child may be dyslexic? There are some obvious signs, if you know what to look for. But not all children have the same cluster of abilities or difficulties.

Look out for the following areas of weaknesses which will appear alongside abilities, which may be in areas of creativity or in highly developed verbal skills:

General

- speed of processing: spoken and/or written language slow
- poor concentration
- has difficulty following instructions
- forgetful of words

Written Work

- has a poor standard of written work compared with oral ability
- produces messy work with many crossings out and words tried several times, eg wippe, wype, wiep, wipe
- is persistently confused by letters which look similar, particularly b/d, p/g, p/q, n/u, m/w
- has poor handwriting with many 'reversals' and badly formed letters
- spells a word several different ways in one piece of writing
- makes anagrams of words, eg tired for tried, breaded for bearded
- produces badly set-out written work, doesn't stay close to the margin
- has poor pencil grip

produces phonetic and bizarre spelling: not age/ability appropriate

uses unusual sequencing of letters or words

Reading

makes poor reading progress, especially using look and say methods

finds it difficult to blend letters together

has difficulty in establishing syllable division or knowing the beginnings and endings of words

pronunciation of words unusual

no expression in reading comprehension poor

is hesitant and laboured in reading, especially when reading aloud

misses out words when reading, or adds extra words

fails to recognise familiar words

loses the point of a story being read or written

has difficulty in picking out the most important points from a passage

Numeracy

shows confusion with number order, eg units, tens, hundreds

is confused by symbols such as + and x signs

has difficulty remembering anything in a sequential order, eg tables, days of the week, the alphabet

Time

has difficulty in learning to tell the time

shows poor time keeping and general awareness

has poor personal organisation

has difficulty remembering what day of the week it is, their birth date, seasons of the year, months of the year

difficulty with concepts – yesterday, today, tomorrow

Skills

has poor motor skills, leading to weaknesses in speed, control and accuracy of the pencil

has a limited understanding of non verbal communication

is confused by the difference between left and right, up and down, east and west

has indeterminate hand preference

performs unevenly from day to day

Behaviour

employs work avoidance tactics, such as sharpening pencils and looking for books

seems to 'dream', does not seem to listen

is easily distracted

is the class clown or is disruptive or withdrawn (these are often cries for help)

is excessively tired due to amount of concentration and effort required

A child who has a cluster of these difficulties together with some abilities may be dyslexic.

Your next step should be to consult the school's SENCo immediately and to decide whether the parents should be informed and the child given appropriate help.