

Primary

National Strategy

Learning and teaching
for dyslexic children

Session 1: Access strategies

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This session will take a minimum of 75 minutes

Objectives

- To increase our understanding of dyslexia and how it can feel to be a dyslexic learner
- To review the way we identify dyslexic learners and assess their learning needs
- To develop the range of whole-school strategies we use to enable dyslexic children to succeed

Resources

- Slides 1.1–1.33
- Handouts 1.1–1.9
- Flipchart and marker pens
- Copies of some of the classroom resources available in the library section of the CD-ROM, for example timetable icons, writing scaffolds, common word lists, writing mat template
- A3 paper for classroom drawing task

Note: All the sessions in these materials are intended to be used flexibly. You will need to select from the information and activities only those that are relevant for your school or group, adapting activities and timings accordingly.

Many of the PowerPoint slides in the sessions contain hyperlinks to video sequences and sound recordings. These links will only operate when the slide show is playing. Follow the instructions on the slide to hear the sound or watch the video.

The slides can be projected onto a screen or an interactive whiteboard. You will need additional speakers if you are using a screen. It is unlikely that the ordinary sound equipment of a laptop will be sufficient.

Session outline

Introduction	5 minutes
What is dyslexia and what does it feel like to be dyslexic?	25 minutes
Identification and assessment	15 minutes
Whole-school access strategies	25 minutes
Conclusion	5 minutes

Introduction

5 minutes

You could begin the session with an overview of the aims of the professional development sessions you are going to be using (**slide 1.1**) and their structure (**slide 1.2**), explaining how the school will be using the sessions (for example, as an inservice training day or as a series of staff meetings).

Slide 1.1

Aims of the sessions

- To increase our understanding of dyslexia and its implications for learning and teaching
- To develop the range of strategies we use to enable dyslexic learners to succeed

Slide 1.1
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Slide 1.2

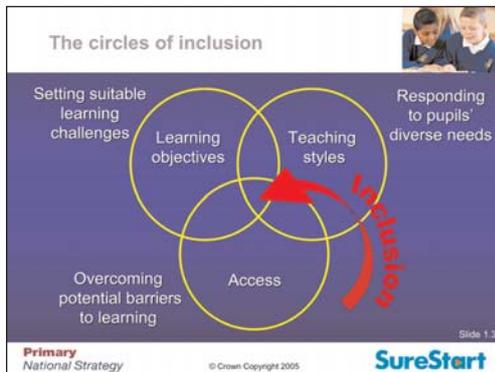
Structure of the sessions

	Focus	Objectives	Time
Session 1	Understanding dyslexia, whole-school access strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase our understanding of dyslexia and how it can feel to be a dyslexic learner • To review the way we identify dyslexic learners and assess their learning needs • To develop the range of whole school strategies we use to enable dyslexic children to access learning 	75 minutes
Session 2	Teaching styles and approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To review teaching styles and approaches which are particularly effective for dyslexic learners 	75 minutes
Session 3	Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase our understanding of dyslexia and how it feels to be a dyslexic reader and writer • To develop a range of strategies to support dyslexic pupils in reading and writing • To increase our understanding of how to teach phonics/spelling to a class in a dyslexia friendly way 	90 minutes
Session 4	Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the possible difficulties encountered by dyslexic children in mathematics • To consider a range of multisensory strategies to support dyslexic children in their mathematical learning 	90 minutes

Slide 1.2
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Use **slide 1.3**, which presents a visual model of the National Curriculum Inclusion Statement, to explain the structure of the sessions.

Slide 1.3



You could use **slide 1.4** to explain that the National Curriculum Inclusion Statement statutory requirement that all teachers set suitable learning challenges for children can be interpreted in terms of **getting the learning objectives right**. Inclusion is not necessarily about every child working on the same learning objectives as every other child in the class: it is essential that we are able, where necessary, to 'track back' through objectives, such as those in the NLS and NNS Frameworks, in order to identify the appropriate objectives, linked to the topic the class are working on, for children who are out of step with their peers. We can then plan how to address these objectives through differentiated questioning and demonstration during whole-class teaching, and through the work we plan for individuals and groups. For dyslexic children such 'tracking back' will be necessary for aspects of literacy teaching (particularly word level work) and sometimes for aspects of mathematics.

This aspect of inclusion will not be covered in the course as it is a straightforward process already well embedded in most classrooms. If necessary, you could offer colleagues additional help through input to year group or class planning sessions.

Slide 1.4



The second National Curriculum Inclusion Statement requirement, overcoming barriers to learning, means using appropriate access strategies (**slide 1.5**). Teachers need to be very aware that children with special educational needs can often work on the same learning objectives as others in the class, as long as the teacher plans access strategies to overcome a barrier between the child and the learning.

Some examples might be:

- if the barrier to learning is written recording, the child might use ICT or work with a 'buddy' who acts as scribe;
- if a barrier to a lesson on problem solving is lack of fluent knowledge of number facts, the child may need to use a calculator;
- if the barrier is motor coordination, so that the child has difficulty in drawing shapes or graphs, they may need to use appropriate software that draws shapes and graphs for them.

Such access strategies are often needed for dyslexic children, and this session explores their use.

Slide **1.5**



The third National Curriculum Inclusion Statement requirement, responding to pupils' diverse needs (**slide 1.6**), means choosing appropriate teaching styles and approaches to take account of the way that different children learn. You could give examples, such as the use of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic modalities, varying the length of tasks, and whether tasks are open or closed. Session 2 of these professional development materials explores teaching styles and approaches that are particularly effective with dyslexic children.

Slide **1.6**



Add that it is usual to see some of the three circles used in classrooms, but to see all of them being used is less common. An example might be getting the learning objectives right in programmes that break mathematics learning down into very small steps, but where, if teaching styles and approaches are not also varied, you will get 'death by worksheet'. Another example

might be the commonly used access strategy of attaching a teaching assistant to the child as if by Velcro, but if the appropriate learning objectives and teaching styles and approaches are not also adjusted the child may be 'helped' to access a totally inappropriate curriculum. All three circles need to work together to ensure inclusion.

What is dyslexia and what does it feel like to be dyslexic? 25 minutes

Ask participants to think about what they already know about dyslexia. Words such as letter, reversal, sequencing, memory, clumsiness, spelling, reading and writing difficulties may be mentioned.

Give out **handout 1.1** to draw out some key points about dyslexic learners. Ask the group, working in pairs, to read the statements and decide whether they are true or false.

Handout 1.1

Handout 1.1	
Key points about dyslexia	
	True or false?
Dyslexia occurs across the ability range.	
There are dyslexic children in every classroom, and dyslexic adults in most staff rooms.	
4% of the population are severely dyslexic, and an estimated 10% mildly so.	
Dyslexia is a learning difference – a combination of strengths and weaknesses which affect the learning process in reading, spelling, writing and sometimes number and calculation.	
Dyslexic learners may also have weaknesses in short-term memory, sequencing and the speed with which they process information.	
Dyslexia has a physiological basis – research indicates neurological differences which generally affect the left hemisphere, which deals with language and sequential processing.	
Dyslexia runs in families.	
Dyslexia occurs on a continuum from mild to severe.	
Dyslexia occurs in all ethnic groups and in all languages.	
Four boys are affected to every one girl.	
Self-esteem is often low which can lead to reduced motivation and sometimes to behaviour problems.	
Dyslexic learners can do as well as anyone else when identified and given appropriate support.	

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Take feedback, then make clear that all the statements are in fact true.

You might then want to give out **handout 1.2**, taken from recent British Dyslexia Association guidance, for participants' reference.

Handout 1.2

Handout 1.2

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning difference, a combination of strengths and weaknesses which affects the learning process, in reading, spelling, writing and sometimes number and calculation. Dyslexic learners may also have accompanying weaknesses in short-term memory, sequencing and the speed at which they process information. These are skills that everyone needs if they are to learn effectively in a busy classroom. They are also key skills for life.

Learning problems arise if dyslexia is not recognised and the teaching is inappropriate. To best understand how to meet the needs of dyslexic learners in mainstream, an appreciation of the subtle changes required in policy and practice is needed. If it is the policy to view dyslexia as a learning deficit, essentially because there is something 'wrong' with the child, then practice will tend to focus on special educational needs, remediation and teaching. However if it is the policy to view dyslexia as a learning difference, one which conveys a range of strengths and weaknesses in common with all learning styles and preferences, then practice is able to focus on inclusion, differentiation and learning.

Viewing dyslexia as a learning difficulty implies that something is 'wrong' with the learner. This leads to a focus on identifying weaknesses rather than celebrating strengths. This, in turn, can result in an emphasis on remediation by specialists rather than resolution by knowledgeable class and subject teachers. One inevitable consequence has been to focus on a school's special needs provision. However, this places responsibility for remediation on the SENCO and diverts attention away from the mainstream classroom which is, after all, the place where dyslexic students spend most of their time.

Specific learning difference

Acknowledging a 'specific learning difficulty' as a 'specific learning difference' places the focus firmly on how all lessons are planned, resourced and taught and also on the way teachers are supported through school policy, practice and ethos. This offers real opportunities for an emphasis on inclusive mainstream strategies which are designed to empower all learners to be the best they can be. In dyslexia-friendly schools the focus has changed from establishing what is wrong with children in order to make them 'better', to identifying what is right in the classroom in order to enhance the effectiveness of learning.

Placing the focus on learning in the mainstream classroom also offers the potential to improve the quality and quantity of discrete intervention. This can take the form of in-class support, withdrawal or a needs-based combination. This can lead to opportunities for more, higher quality intervention as additional needs are met in dyslexia-friendly mainstream settings.

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Ask the group to reflect on the classes they teach or work with and note down the names of children known to be dyslexic. Say that later in the session they will be returning to this list to see if there are any names they might want to add.

Use **slide 1.7** to show some of the talents that dyslexic learners can have. This would be a good time to give examples of some very successful and creative dyslexic people, for example Leonardo da Vinci, Einstein (who did not speak till he was 4 or read till he was 12), the architect Richard Rogers, the actress Suzannah York, the poet Benjamin Zephaniah, the writer Lynda La Plante, the comedian Eddie Izzard and the sportsman Steve Redgrave (who has only read four books, two of which he himself wrote).

Slide 1.7

Talents and abilities that often accompany dyslexia



- Lateral thinking and imaginative problem solving
- Good spatial awareness and visualising skills

Slide 1.7

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Make the point that talents may not be apparent at school if self-esteem is low or children's learning needs are not being met and they become frustrated and disillusioned.



Activity 1.1: What does it feel like to be dyslexic? (15 minutes)

This activity uses a video sequence (hyperlinked to slide 1.8) that gives some insight into what it might feel like to be dyslexic. The sequence comes from a BBC television series and was made some time ago. As they watch the extract, participants might reflect on how far the experiences of the child portrayed are still current today.

Use **slide 1.8** to set the task.

Slide 1.8

What does it feel like to be dyslexic?

- Watch the video sequence
- Identify the emotions the child is experiencing
- Reflect on how far this child's experience is still current in schools today

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Take feedback on what feelings the child in the video extract might have (frustration, anger, anxiety) and initiate a discussion on the impact of these feelings (low self-esteem, reduced motivation, behaviour difficulties). **Handout 1.3**, What children say, might be useful at this point.

Handout 1.3

Handout 1.3

What children say

<p>Dyslexer</p> <p>I was born with it But because of it I got hit for it I cried about it Fought because of it Tried to get rid of it Albert Einstein had it Sulked about it Called names because of it I didn't like it Mum had enough of me because of it Couldn't be bothered to live with it Do we really have to have it? Mum thought I was lazy because of it I thought I was crazy because of it Punched walls because of it Got in trouble over it Disrupted class because of it Walked out, away from it Embarrassed because of it I'm ashamed of it I swore at teachers because of it Just have to live with it</p> <p>John Rogers and Lea Bourne</p>	<p>Alistair, aged 9</p> <p>1. Disappointment Monday: I worked really hard at turning to nit and did a brittle purple egg cosie with air holes in it. It took me over two weeks to do it. Took my cosie in to show but I lost it before showing. I forgot to bring my cote home.</p> <p>2. Embarrassment Tuesday: My glasses were not in my draw but I don't wear them any more anyway because people make fun of me so it doesn't really matter. My trainers had gone walkies and I had to do PE in my football boots.</p> <p>3. Humiliation Wednesday: I opened my bag at lunch time and found that I had not put my dinner in. I lost the beet in music and was sent out.</p> <p>4. Frustration Thursday: I remembered to take my lunch to school but then forgot to bring my lunchbag home. I left my outdoor shoes at school as well.</p> <p>5. Relief Friday: A good day. Found my trainers in lost property. Scored a goal.</p>
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If any of the staff group are themselves dyslexic they might be willing to share some of their own experiences of school and their feelings about those experiences. If you can, draw out what helped

them and what teachers and others did that made a positive difference, as well as their feelings about any negative experiences.

End this section by pointing out that identification and understanding of the difficulties that dyslexic children face is essential if we are to prevent children experiencing the frustrations that have been discussed and enable them to learn effectively.

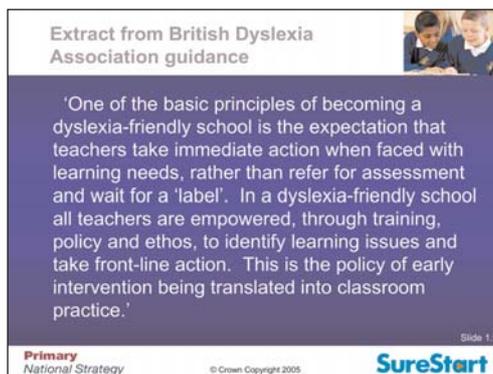
Identification and assessment

15 minutes

Say that while in the past there has been an emphasis on referring children to outside agencies for specialist assessment and waiting – sometimes a long time – for the outcome, practice is now changing so that all teachers feel able to identify indicators of dyslexia and take appropriate action.

Slide 1.9, an extract from recent British Dyslexia Association guidance, emphasises this point.

Slide 1.9



Extract from British Dyslexia Association guidance

'One of the basic principles of becoming a dyslexia-friendly school is the expectation that teachers take immediate action when faced with learning needs, rather than refer for assessment and wait for a 'label'. In a dyslexia-friendly school all teachers are empowered, through training, policy and ethos, to identify learning issues and take front-line action. This is the policy of early intervention being translated into classroom practice.'

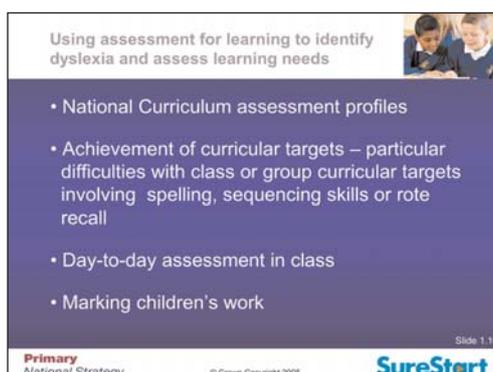
Slide 1.9

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It will be important to reference your own school or LEA policy on identification and assessment of dyslexia here, but you might want to make the point that current best practice often starts from an assumption that children who experience persistent literacy difficulties not explained by other factors probably fall somewhere on the dyslexic continuum. This enables everyone to focus on action ('What are we going to do about it?') rather than lengthy debate.

Slide 1.10 describes tools teachers can use to identify dyslexia and assess learning needs. The slide places assessment for learning at the heart of this process.

Slide 1.10



Using assessment for learning to identify dyslexia and assess learning needs

- National Curriculum assessment profiles
- Achievement of curricular targets – particular difficulties with class or group curricular targets involving spelling, sequencing skills or rote recall
- Day-to-day assessment in class
- Marking children's work

Slide 1.10

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Expand on the points on the slide using the examples that follow.

National Curriculum assessment profiles

Strengths in some subjects (including speaking and listening), weaknesses in reading, writing and often in numbers and the number system, calculations.

Achievement of curricular targets

Particular difficulties with class or group curriculum targets involving spelling, sequencing skills or rote recall. Examples might be curricular targets in class to 'understand how to use alphabetically ordered texts to retrieve information', 'order 3-digit numbers in ascending/descending order' or 'use known facts and place value to consolidate mental division'.

Day-to-day assessment in class

Response to questions and oral discussion that shows greater understanding than is evident in written work, observations that show the child struggling to hold facts in mind when they work on a multi-step mathematical problem, response to questions in word level work that show difficulty in analysing and synthesising the sounds in spoken words, observations that show the child having difficulty in remembering instructions and organising themselves for learning, discussions with the child about what they are finding easy and difficult in their learning.

Marking children's work

Letter reversals, spelling a word in several different ways in one piece of writing, unusual spellings that bear little relationship to the sounds in the word or are heavily phonetic.

Make reference here to assessment tools provided by the Primary National Strategy, such as the screening tools to identify children with poor phonological awareness that form part of *Playing with sounds: a supplement to Progression in phonics* (DfES 0281-2004), which you can find in the Library section of this CD-ROM, and the screening and selection tools in *Early literacy support* (DfES 0651-2001).



Activity 1.2: Checklists

(5 minutes)

Explain that checklists can be useful in drawing together observations from assessment for learning and from other information about the child, for example, from parents/carers. In this activity (**slide 1.11**) the group will look at one checklist, perhaps in year group or class teams, and consider as they read whether any children they teach come to mind. You could ask the group to reflect on the list they made earlier of dyslexic children in their class and consider whether there are any children they might want to add. They might want to keep this list in mind as they work through the sessions.

Emphasise that many children will show some of the signs identified on the checklists, but it is only when they show a high number, or when a key indicator such as a family history of dyslexia is combined with several other indicators, that there is cause for concern.

Handout 1.4 provides a checklist for the Foundation Stage, and **handout 1.5** for Key Stages 1 and 2.

Slide 1.11

Checklist

- Look at the checklist appropriate to the age group you teach
- Do any children come to mind?

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Handout 1.4

Handout 1.4

Foundation Stage checklist

There is a large body of research linking speech and language difficulties in early childhood to later literacy problems. As much as can be done pre-school to help a child at risk, early identification is really important. Although some children may have difficulties with some parts of their learning, they are just as bright and able as their peers – in some cases even brighter! They are often creative and imaginative. At the same time they also have difficulties. If a child shows a cluster of difficulties, you will need to take action.

Here are some hints on identification.

Watch out for the child who does not outgrow the following possible indicators:

- has difficulty learning nursery rhymes
- has difficulty in paying attention, sitting still, listening to stories
- likes listening to stories but shows no interest in letters or words
- has difficulty learning to sing or recite the alphabet
- has a history of slow speech development
- gets words muddled, e.g. cucumber, flutterby
- has difficulty keeping to a simple rhythm
- finds it hard to carry out two or more instructions at one time (e.g. put the toys in the box, then put the box on the shelf) but is fine if tasks are presented in smaller units
- forgets names of friends, teacher, colours
- has poor phonological awareness – cannot easily analyse the sounds in spoken words or blend sounds to make words
- has difficulty cutting, sticking and crayoning in comparison with their peer group
- has persistent difficulty in dressing, e.g. finds shoelaces and buttons difficult
- puts clothes on the wrong way round
- has difficulty with catching, kicking or throwing a ball
- often trips, bumps into things and falls over
- has difficulty hopping or skipping
- has obvious 'good' and 'bad' days for no apparent reason

A child who has a cluster of these difficulties may be dyslexic, but remember that the levels of development and speed of learning differ significantly for each child in this age group.

We are grateful to the British Dyslexia Association for permission to reproduce this guidance, taken from their *Assessing Dyslexic Primary School* guide.

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Handout 1.5

Handout 1.5

Key Stages 1 and 2 checklist

Do any of your pupils struggle with spelling, writing, reading or mathematics? Do they not progress as quickly as their classmates – or worse, not seem to progress at all? There are obvious inconsistencies in these individuals, many of them exhibiting abilities alongside weaknesses.

You have been teaching well and hope that, like other pupils in your class, this child will improve their basic skills over time; but you see little or no change.

How can you tell if they might be dyslexic? Look out for the following signs, but remember: not all dyslexic children have the same cluster of difficulties and abilities. Watch out for strengths in areas of creativity and/or highly developed verbal skills.

General

- speed of processing: spoken and/or written language slow
- poor concentration
- has difficulty following instructions
- forgetful of words
- has difficulty remembering anything in a sequential order, e.g. tables, days of the week, the alphabet

Written work

- has a poor standard of written work compared with oral ability
- produces messy work with many crossings out
- is persistently confused by letters which look similar, particularly b/d, p/q, r/l, m/w
- has poor handwriting, possibly with 'reversals' and badly formed letters
- spells a word several different ways in one piece of writing, e.g. wippe, wype, wlep, wipe
- makes anagrams of words, e.g. 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

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Emphasise that some children will need more specialist assessment if they fail to respond to the kinds of teaching strategies discussed in these sessions. **Handout 1.6** suggests some appropriate referral routes.

Handout 1.6

Handout 1.6

Further assessment

The British Dyslexia Association suggest that if after 12 weeks a child has not made progress under normal dyslexia-friendly classroom teaching, refer on to the SENCO. You may need to consult with:

- a speech and language therapist;
- an occupational therapist;
- the behaviour or learning support service;
- an educational psychologist;
- an optometrist/orthoptist;
- an ear, nose and throat specialist.

You may want to have hearing checked (for example, to see if the child has 'glue ear'), if the child:

- becomes restless after periods of listening;
- shows poor phonological awareness.

You may want to consult an optometrist/orthoptist if the child:

- loses place easily when reading;
- needs to use a finger or card to mark place;
- moves head a lot when reading; head close to page;
- tires quickly with close work;
- has headaches after study;
- has difficulty copying from the board;
- complains of eyestrain or discomfort about the eyes;
- rubs eyes or blinks a lot – especially when reading;
- has untidy handwriting;
- shows inaccurate reading, which deteriorates quickly with time.

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Activity 1.3: Identifying dyslexic learners

(5 minutes)

This activity (**slide 1.12**) involves watching a video sequence about how one school identifies dyslexic learners.

Slide 1.12

How one school identifies dyslexic learners



Slide 1.12

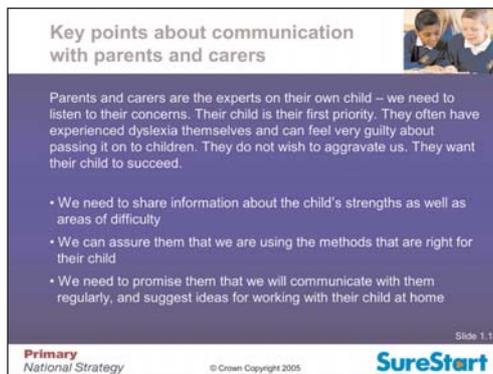
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Notice similarities and differences between this school and your practice. You could ask half the staff to look out for similarities and half to note differences between practice at the school in the video extract and practice in your school.

Take feedback about people's reaction to the extract. Make the point that because the school in the video sequence teaches all pupils in a dyslexia-friendly way, many children with mild dyslexia need no further help. The professional development sessions you are undertaking together will enable you to adopt a similar approach.

End this section with a discussion of the vital role of parents and carers in identification and assessment. Ask participants to pick out items from the checklists they looked at earlier (handouts 1.4 and 1.5) where parents and carers would have important insights to share. Encourage discussion about whether approaches based on the school's own rapid identification of dyslexic learning needs, rather than referral on for more specialist assessment, are likely to be helpful to parents and carers. You could use **slide 1.13** to make some key points about communication with parents/carers. Emphasise that it is essential to work with parents and carers, not only because of their concerns and the insights that they may bring to the assessment process, but also because children will need systematic help from both school and home.

Slide **1.13**



Key points about communication with parents and carers

Parents and carers are the experts on their own child – we need to listen to their concerns. Their child is their first priority. They often have experienced dyslexia themselves and can feel very guilty about passing it on to children. They do not wish to aggravate us. They want their child to succeed.

- We need to share information about the child's strengths as well as areas of difficulty
- We can assure them that we are using the methods that are right for their child
- We need to promise them that we will communicate with them regularly, and suggest ideas for working with their child at home

Slide 1.13

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Further information about working with parents and carers can be found in the Library section of this CD-ROM.

Whole-school access strategies

25 minutes

This part of the session is about how a school can organise learning in a dyslexia-friendly way. You could say that, if we do this, not only do we help all children, but those children with mild dyslexia may not need further support. Those with more severe difficulties will be able to access the curriculum. If children feel successful, many of the secondary difficulties such as behaviour or lack of motivation are reduced.

If we can minimise the above difficulties, the learning of all pupils will be improved.

Slide 1.14 emphasises the importance of a whole-school approach – everyone working together, rather than individual teachers doing excellent work in their own classrooms, without opportunities for everyone to share practice.

Slide 1.14

Why a whole-school approach is crucial 

We know that dyslexic children do well with appropriate support

Dyslexia-friendly approaches benefit all children

Many of the strategies that help children with dyslexia are relatively simple to establish

A whole-school approach means that all children are included

All adults in the school will understand the difficulties and use helpful approaches

Children will experience consistency in good practice from year to year

Slide 1.14

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The learning and teaching approaches recommended by the Primary National Strategy (**slide 1.15**) are a good basis for dyslexia-friendly education. The professional development materials *Excellence and Enjoyment: learning and teaching in the primary years* (DfES 0518-2004 G) could be a reference point here. If you have used these materials in school, you could make links to your school discussions about the themes on the slide.

Slide 1.15

Building on current approaches 

Dyslexia-friendly education builds on current approaches in the Primary National Strategy:

- The use of assessment for learning
- The use of different teaching styles to accommodate a variety of learning styles
- The importance of a broad and rich curriculum
- The importance of the conditions for learning – an ethos in which children feel able to take risks, make mistakes and support each other's learning

Slide 1.15

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You could use slide **1.16** to outline some components of a whole-school approach that overcomes barriers and enables dyslexic children to access learning.

Slide 1.16

Access strategies for a whole-school approach 

Access strategies for a whole-school approach include:

- Dyslexia-friendly classroom organisation
- A whole-school approach to building children's confidence and self-esteem

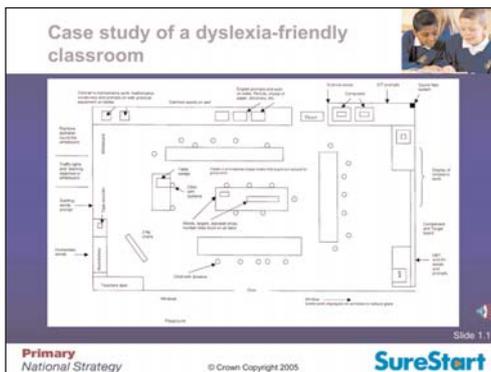
Slide 1.16

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Dyslexia-friendly classroom organisation

Begin with a discussion about dyslexia-friendly classroom organisation, using **slides 1.17–1.30**. The slides provide a case study of work in one classroom. Run through the slides, clicking on the sound button to hear the class teacher or SENCO talking about the approach. Explain that most of the approaches will be familiar to teachers. The important thing is that they are consistent throughout the school and that the class teacher regularly reminds the children about them. Without this, dyslexic children will forget to use the help available.

Slide 1.17



You might want to expand on slide 1.27, which shows a rainbow alphabet. Rainbow alphabets are useful to help children manipulate letters, see patterns and work in a multisensory way on spelling and phonics. On the slide we see a metal whiteboard and magnetic letters. The vowels are in different colours. Children are given repeated experience of setting out the letters of the alphabet in an arc and using it to make words, play full circle, play onset and rime games, and so on.



Activity 1.4: Dyslexia-friendly classrooms

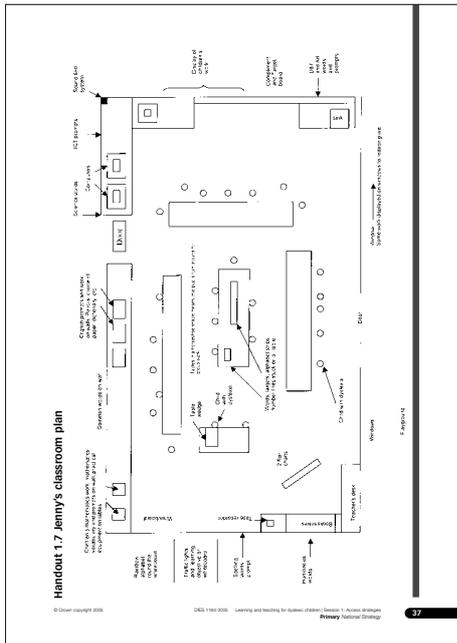
(10 minutes)

Slide 1.31 explains this activity in which participants reflect on their own classroom organisation.

Give out **handouts 1.7** (Jenny's classroom plan) and **1.8** (Dyslexia-friendly classrooms). A3 paper might be useful here. You could also put out a range of resources available on this CD-ROM.

- Timetable icons (for visual timetables)
- Writing mat template
- Instructions poster
- What can I do if I can't spell a word? poster
- Common words

Handout 1.7



Handout 1.8

Handout 1.8

Dyslexia-friendly classrooms

Seating and grouping

- Group according to the requirements of the task, not by literacy level, unless specifically teaching literacy skills.
- Seat dyslexic children away from distractions and next to children who are good at focusing on learning.
- Seat dyslexic children where the teacher can make eye contact easily.
- Seat left-handed children on the left side of right-handed children.
- Check that the chair and table are at the appropriate height and angle.
- Use a writing wedge to rest on if it is helpful.
- Check that the child is sitting in good light and can see the teacher and the board easily.

Texts and independence

- Give transcripts or photocopies rather than ask the child to read from the board. Make all text dyslexia-friendly (see handout 2.1).
- Present information in a range of ways, e.g. pictures, flow charts, through drama, cards to sort, etc.
- Display prompts and reminders about what to do, where to find things, useful words, etc. Refer to them often and leave them in the same place.
- Provide word lists and word banks, colour-coded and organised systematically so children can find words easily. Use sticky tack so that word cards can be taken to child's desk and then returned. Refer to the word lists regularly.
- All children can have word lists, prompts and personal targets on their tables.
- Use visual timetables. Personal and more detailed timetables can be given to individuals. Remind class/child of dates/activities before events.

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Staff may want to take some of these resources away with them to use in their classrooms.

Slide 1.31

Dyslexia-friendly classrooms

- Look at the handout on dyslexia-friendly classrooms and the plan of Jenny's classroom. Think about what she said on the slides
- Draw your classroom
- Label anything that is dyslexia-friendly at the moment
- Draw new approaches that you might introduce
- You might want to look at some of the resources that are on display

Slide 1.31

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Emphasise that people can draw or label any arrangements or resources that support dyslexic learners, such as grouping of pupils for whole-class, group and independent work, arrangements for paired talk, displays, coloured pens, spelling equipment, plastic letters, sticky notes to remind children of the task in independent work, and so on.

Participants might discuss their plan with a neighbour when they have finished it.

A whole-school approach to building children's confidence and self-esteem

You could use **slide 1.32** to illustrate some of the things dyslexic children often say about themselves. The slide hyperlinks to another video sequence of effective school practice.

Slide 1.32



Things dyslexic children often say about themselves

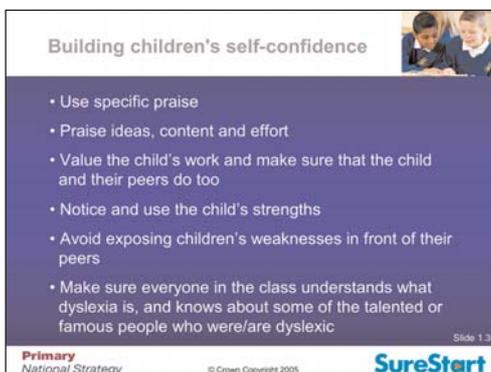
- 'I must be stupid.'
- 'I know I can't do my work.'
- 'No-one understands.'
- 'Everyone laughs at me.'
- 'People will like me if I do silly things to make them laugh.'

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Ask participants, as they watch, to note how the school builds the confidence and self-esteem of all its children.

Take suggestions from the group about ways in which they build self-confidence for the children they teach or work with. Compare their ideas with those on **slide 1.33**.

Slide 1.33



Building children's self-confidence

- Use specific praise
- Praise ideas, content and effort
- Value the child's work and make sure that the child and their peers do too
- Notice and use the child's strengths
- Avoid exposing children's weaknesses in front of their peers
- Make sure everyone in the class understands what dyslexia is, and knows about some of the talented or famous people who were/are dyslexic

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You might want to ask staff to look at **handout 1.9** here, which is taken from *Excellence and Enjoyment: learning and teaching in the primary years* (DfES 0518-2004 G) and describes particular kinds of language that build children's confidence.

Handout 1.9

Handout 1.9

To build self-confidence, use:

- **the language of success**
Signal confidence to the children in their ability to succeed with phrases such as 'I know you can...'
- **the language of hope**
Create an ethos where it is acceptable for children to say 'I'll try but I need some help...'; rather than 'I cannot do it...'. Support this by using phrases such as 'you can do it...', and 'What helps you do it?'
- **the language of possibility**
Learners may express limits to their achievements with phrases such as 'I'm no good at...' and 'I always get X wrong'. Support a climate of greater possibility by the language you use in response, such as 'yes, you did get it a bit mixed up but let's see which bit is causing you problems.'

From Hughes, M. and Issac, A. (2003) Strategies for closing the learning gap, Network Educational Press

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Conclusion

5 minutes

You might want to end this session by quoting the conclusions drawn from a survey of the views of dyslexic children.

Overall, it is clear that these pupils have no difficulty recognising the learning environment in which they can succeed. It is interesting that the underlying theme is the emotional climate in the classroom rather than any specific techniques or special methodology. They want calmness and security, the feeling that teachers might actually like them and are enthusiastic about their subject, quiet recognition of their difference and the provision of low-key differentiation and support.

Ask staff to reflect on this important message.

End by summing up the objectives for the session.

- To increase our understanding of dyslexia and how it can feel to be a dyslexic learner.
- To review the way we identify dyslexic learners and assess their learning needs.
- To develop the range of whole-school strategies we use to enable dyslexic children to succeed.

As a group, identify three ideas you will all aim to try out as a result of the session.

If you are using these sessions as a series of short professional development meetings rather than an inservice training day or half-day, plan how you will implement your ideas and support each other in making the changes you have identified. Make time, when you next meet as a staff group to focus on dyslexia, for people to talk about the work they undertook, and what they learned.

Handout 1.1

Key points about dyslexia

	True or false?
Dyslexia occurs across the ability range.	
There are dyslexic children in every classroom, and dyslexic adults in most staff rooms.	
4% of the population are severely dyslexic, and an estimated 10% mildly so.	
Dyslexia is a learning difference – a combination of strengths and weaknesses which affect the learning process in reading, spelling, writing and sometimes number and calculation.	
Dyslexic learners may also have weaknesses in short-term memory, sequencing and the speed with which they process information.	
Dyslexia has a physiological basis – research indicates neurological differences which generally affect the left hemisphere, which deals with language and sequential processing.	
Dyslexia runs in families.	
Dyslexia occurs on a continuum from mild to severe.	
Dyslexia occurs in all ethnic groups and in all languages.	
Four boys are affected to every one girl.	
Self-esteem is often low which can lead to reduced motivation and sometimes to behaviour problems.	
Dyslexic learners can do as well as anyone else when identified and given appropriate support.	



Handout 1.2

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning difference, a combination of strengths and weaknesses which affects the learning process in reading, spelling, writing and sometimes number and calculation. Dyslexic learners may also have accompanying weaknesses in short-term memory, sequencing and the speed at which they process information. These are skills that everyone needs if they are to learn effectively in a busy classroom. They are also key skills for life.

Learning problems arise if dyslexia is not recognised and the teaching is inappropriate. To best understand how to meet the needs of dyslexic learners in mainstream, an appreciation of the subtle changes required in policy and practice is needed. If it is the policy to view dyslexia as a learning deficit, essentially because there is something 'wrong' with the child, then practice will tend to focus on special educational needs, remediation and teaching. However if it is the policy to view dyslexia as a learning difference, one which conveys a range of strengths and weaknesses in common with all learning styles and preferences, then practice is able to focus on inclusion, differentiation and learning.

Viewing dyslexia as a learning difficulty implies that something is 'wrong' with the learner. This leads to a focus on identifying weaknesses rather than celebrating strengths. This, in turn, can result in an emphasis on remediation by specialists rather than resolution by knowledgeable class and subject teachers. One inevitable consequence has been to focus on a school's special needs provision. However, this places responsibility for remediation on the SENCO and diverts attention away from the mainstream classroom which is, after all, the place where dyslexic students spend most of their time.

Specific learning difference

Acknowledging a 'specific learning difficulty' as a 'specific learning difference' places the focus firmly on how all lessons are planned, resourced and taught and also on the way teachers are supported through school policy, practice and ethos. This offers real opportunities for an emphasis on inclusive mainstream strategies which are designed to empower all learners to be the best they can be. In dyslexia-friendly schools the focus has changed from establishing what is wrong with children in order to make them 'better', to identifying what is right in the classroom in order to enhance the effectiveness of learning.

Placing the focus on learning in the mainstream classroom also offers the potential to improve the quality and quantity of discrete intervention. This can take the form of in-class support, withdrawal or a needs-based combination. This can lead to opportunities for more, higher quality intervention as additional needs are met in dyslexia-friendly mainstream settings.

One of the basic principles of becoming a dyslexia-friendly school is the expectation that teachers take immediate action when faced with learning needs, rather than refer for assessment and wait for a 'label'. In a dyslexia-friendly school all teachers are empowered, through training, policy and ethos, to identify learning issues and take front-line action. This is the policy of 'early intervention' being translated into classroom practice.

Defining dyslexia as a specific learning difference also conveys a realistic balance of opportunities and costs, strengths and weaknesses for the child. The 'straight-line thinking' typical of some learners is effective for the step-by-step processing of certain types of material, yet is less effective when creativity is required. The eclectic style of other students may enhance creativity yet fail to yield results when a task calls for step-by-step processing.

While it is acknowledged that some dyslexic learners will still require discrete specialist support at some time, the notion of dyslexia as a specific learning difficulty is arguably unhelpful, certainly within the inclusive ethos of a dyslexia-friendly classroom. The skill of the teacher lies in achieving a balance between empowerment and challenge within clearly understood patterns of strength and weakness. Therefore, viewing dyslexia as a difficulty may be to fundamentally misunderstand the situation. In the mainstream classroom setting the class teacher, guided by school ethos, policy and practice, has the power to make dyslexia a learning difficulty or a learning difference – it really is as simple as that.

Constitutional in origin

A learner who is dyslexic is just that – and teaching 'harder' cannot change that reality. Research into the architecture of the brain suggests that very real differences occur as the foetus develops and these differences are responsible for the familiar pattern of strengths and weaknesses that typify dyslexic learners. While research continues to focus on a range of neurological issues, for the classroom teacher it is enough to appreciate that dyslexia defines dyslexic learners, making them what they are. Paying attention to empowerment, emotional intelligence and self-esteem may prove to be more valuable than a detailed knowledge of a learner's neurological makeup.

Unexpected and persistent difficulties

It would be foolish to suggest that dyslexic learners do not experience difficulties in learning certain skills. However, there is growing awareness of the extent to which these difficulties are 'institutional', that is, created by policy and practice. The key to recognising dyslexia in mainstream settings is to focus on 'unexpected' aspects of performance in relation to ability. Teachers often readily recognise learners who find it very difficult to produce ability-appropriate evidence of learning. Yet these teachers also acknowledge that dyslexic learners are often

as effective as their peers during the oral, group work phase of a lesson. Therefore, a helpful starting point is to focus on learners who 'think' a subject. These are pupils who perhaps demonstrate a clear verbal understanding of concepts but who experience unexpected difficulties when it comes to getting it down on paper.

'Persistent difficulties' are also an important concept. Once again it helps to focus on learners who continue to have persistent difficulties in certain areas despite quality learning opportunities, which have helped others with apparently similar needs. Teaching 'harder' does not address persistent learning difficulties, though teaching differently does. The most effective response to persistent difficulties is to acknowledge that 'if they don't learn the way we teach them, we must teach them the way they learn'.

Acquiring certain skills

The 'unexpected' problems tend to arise in the acquisition and application of aspects of basic skills. These problems often occur despite adequate opportunity to learn and are highlighted against a background of ability-appropriate skill acquisition in other areas. Dyslexic students are usually as good as their peers at many things until, for example, they need to write it down. In the mainstream classroom, problems seem to occur in areas such as speed of processing, short-term memory, sequencing and possible weaknesses in auditory and/or perceptual skills.

We are grateful to the British Dyslexia Association for permission to reproduce this guidance, taken from their *Achieving Dyslexia Friendly Schools* pack.



Handout 1.3

What children say

<p>Dislexser</p> <p>I was born with it But because of it I got hit for it I cried about it Fought because of it Tried to get rid of it Albert Einstein had it Sulked about it Called names because of it I didn't like it Mum had enough of me because of it Couldn't be bothered to live with it Do we really have to have it? Mum thought I was lazy because of it I thought I was crazy because of it Punched walls because of it Got in trouble over it Disrupted class because of it Walked out, away from it Embarrassed because of it I'm ashamed of it I swore at teachers because of it Just have to live with it</p> <p>John Rogers and Lea Bourne</p>	<p>Alistair, aged 9</p> <p>1. Disappointment Monday: I worked realey hard at lurning to nit and did a brite purpul egg cosie with air holes in it. It took me over two weeks to do it. Took my cosie in to show but I lost it before showing. I forgot to bring my cote home.</p> <p>2. Embarrassment Tuesday: My glasses were not in my draw but I don't were them any moor anyway because people make fun of me so it dosent realey matter My traners had gone walkys and I had to do PE in my football boots.</p> <p>3. Humiliation Wednesday: I opend my bag at lunch time and found that I had not put my dinner in. I lost the beet in music and was sent out.</p> <p>4. Frustration Thursday: I rembered to take my lunch to school but then forgot to bring my lunchbag home. I left my outdoor shoes at school as well.</p> <p>5. Relief Friday: A good day. Found my traners in lost propurtey. Scored a gol.</p>
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Handout 1.4

Foundation Stage checklist

There is a large body of research linking speech and language difficulties in early childhood to later literacy problems. As much can be done pre-school to help a child at risk, early identification is really important. Although some children may have difficulties with some parts of their learning, they are just as bright and able as their peers – in some cases even brighter! They are often creative and imaginative. At the same time they also have difficulties. If a child shows a cluster of difficulties, you will need to take action.

Here are some hints on identification.

Watch out for the child who does not outgrow the following possible indicators:

- has difficulty learning nursery rhymes
- has difficulty in paying attention, sitting still, listening to stories
- likes listening to stories but shows no interest in letters or words
- has difficulty learning to sing or recite the alphabet
- has a history of slow speech development
- gets words muddled, e.g. cubumber, flutterby
- has difficulty keeping to a simple rhythm
- finds it hard to carry out two or more instructions at one time (e.g. put the toys in the box, then put the box on the shelf) but is fine if tasks are presented in smaller units
- forgets names of friends, teacher, colours
- has poor phonological awareness – cannot easily analyse the sounds in spoken words or blend sounds to make words
- has difficulty cutting, sticking and crayoning in comparison with their peer group
- has persistent difficulty in dressing, e.g. finds shoelaces and buttons difficult
- puts clothes on the wrong way round
- has difficulty with catching, kicking or throwing a ball
- often trips, bumps into things and falls over
- has difficulty hopping or skipping
- has obvious 'good' and 'bad' days for no apparent reason

A child who has a cluster of these difficulties may be dyslexic, but remember that the levels of development and speed of learning differ significantly for each child in this age group.

We are grateful to the British Dyslexia Association for permission to reproduce this guidance, taken from their *Achieving Dyslexia Friendly Schools* pack.



Handout 1.5

Key Stages 1 and 2 checklist

Do any of your pupils struggle with spelling, writing, reading or mathematics? Do they not progress as quickly as their classmates – or worse, not seem to progress at all? There are obvious inconsistencies in these individuals, many of them exhibiting abilities alongside weaknesses.

You have been teaching well and hope that, like other pupils in your class, this child will improve their basic skills over time; but you see little or no change.

How can you tell if they might be dyslexic? Look out for the following signs, but remember: not all dyslexic children have the same cluster of difficulties and abilities. Watch out for strengths in areas of creativity and/or highly developed verbal skills.

General

- speed of processing: spoken and/or written language slow
- poor concentration
- has difficulty following instructions
- forgetful of words
- has difficulty remembering anything in a sequential order, e.g. tables, days of the week, the alphabet

Written work

- has a poor standard of written work compared with oral ability
- produces messy work with many crossings out
- is persistently confused by letters which look similar, particularly b/d, p/g, p/q, n/u, m/w
- has poor handwriting, possibly with 'reversals' and badly formed letters
- spells a word several different ways in one piece of writing, e.g. wippe, wype, wiep, wipe
- makes anagrams of words, e.g. 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
- finds it difficult to blend letters together
- has difficulty in establishing syllable division or knowing the beginnings and endings of words
- no expression in reading
- comprehension poor
- 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

Mathematics

- shows confusion with number order, e.g. units, tens, hundreds
- is confused by symbols such as + and × signs
- has difficulty remembering anything in a sequential order, e.g. tables, days of the week, the alphabet
- difficulty learning and remembering times tables
- may reverse numbers 2 .. 5

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: 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 differences 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

We are grateful to the British Dyslexia Association for permission to reproduce this guidance, taken from their *Achieving Dyslexia Friendly Schools* pack.



Handout 1.6

Further assessment

The British Dyslexia Association suggest that if after 12 weeks a child has not made progress under normal dyslexia-friendly classroom teaching, refer on to the SENCO. You may need to consult with:

- a speech and language therapist;
- an occupational therapist;
- the behaviour or learning support service;
- an educational psychologist;
- an optometrist/orthoptist;
- an ear, nose and throat specialist.

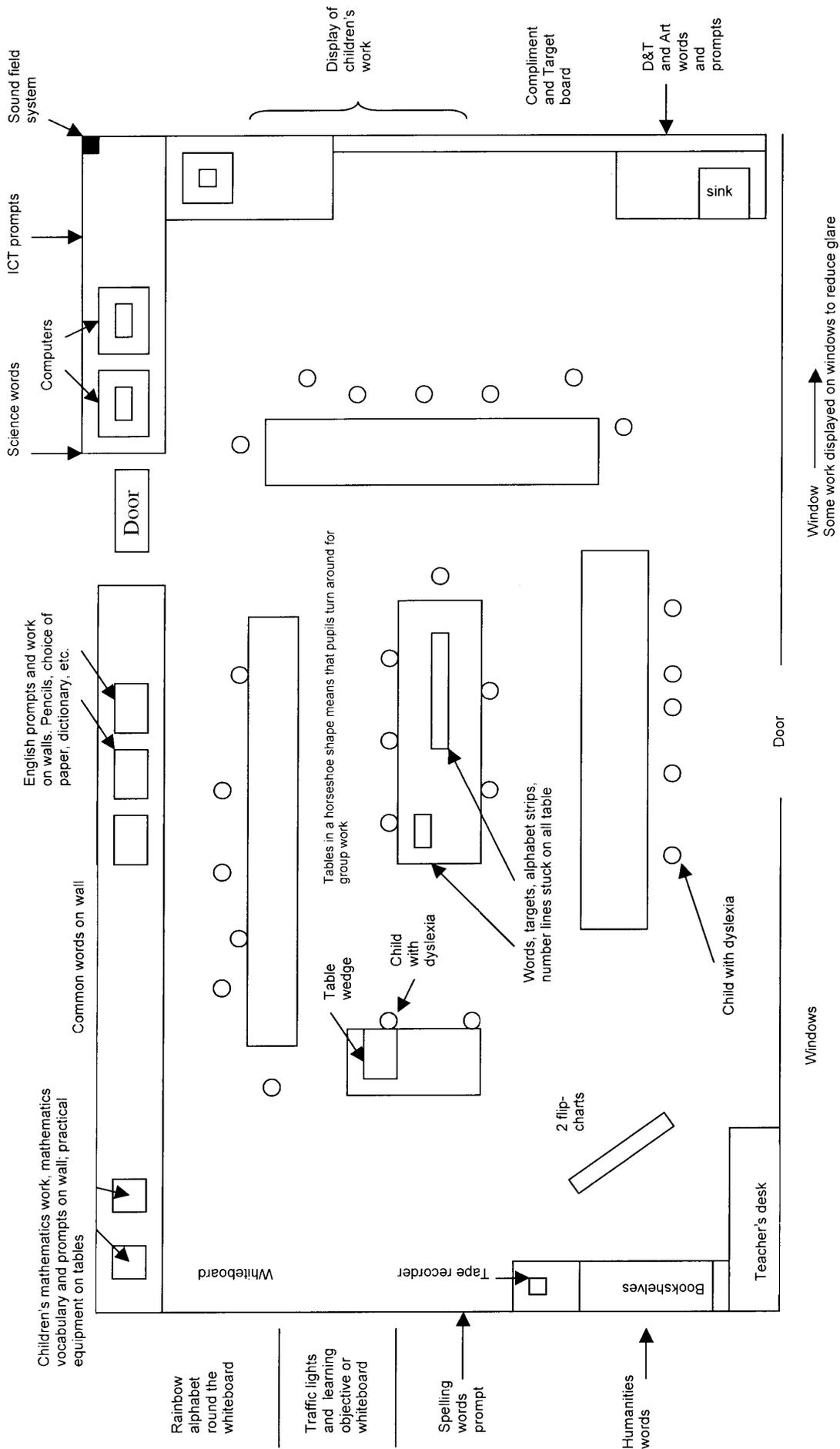
You may want to have hearing checked (for example, to see if the child has 'glue ear'), if the child:

- becomes restless after periods of listening;
- shows poor phonological awareness.

You may want to consult an optometrist/orthoptist if the child:

- loses place easily when reading;
- needs to use a finger or card to mark place;
- moves head a lot when reading; head close to page;
- tires quickly with close work;
- has headaches after study;
- has difficulty copying from the board;
- complains of eyestrain or discomfort about the eyes;
- rubs eyes or blinks a lot – especially when reading;
- has untidy handwriting;
- shows inaccurate reading, which deteriorates quickly with time.

Handout 1.7 Jenny's classroom plan





Handout 1.8

Dyslexia-friendly classrooms

Seating and grouping

- Group according to the requirements of the task, not by literacy level, unless specifically teaching literacy skills.
- Seat dyslexic children away from distractions and next to children who are good at focusing on learning.
- Seat dyslexic children where the teacher can make eye contact easily.
- Seat left-handed children on the left side of right-handed children.
- Check that the chair and table are at the appropriate height and angle.
- Use a writing wedge to rest on if it is helpful.
- Check that the child is sitting in good light and can see the teacher and the board easily.

Texts and independence

- Give transcripts or photocopies rather than ask the child to read from the board. Make all text dyslexia-friendly (see handout 2.1).
- Present information in a range of ways, e.g. pictures, flow charts, through drama, cards to sort, etc.
- Display prompts and reminders about what to do, where to find things, useful words, etc. Refer to them often and leave them in the same place.
- Provide word lists and word banks, colour-coded and organised systematically so children can find words easily. Use sticky tack so that word cards can be taken to child's desk and then returned. Refer to the word lists regularly.
- All children can have word lists, prompts and personal targets on their tables.
- Use visual timetables. Personal and more detailed timetables can be given to individuals. Remind class/child of dates/activities before events.

Equipment

- Ensure easy access to equipment, computers, tapes, etc. Use labels to help children find what they need.
- Use tapes for both listening and recording children's ideas.
- Use the digital recording facility on computers to record instructions or texts for children to listen to or to make their own recordings instead of a writing outcome.
- Have mathematics resources, plastic letters, magnetic rainbow alphabets, word cards and word mats available. Consider the use of a spelling tray containing some of these things, which can be taken to a table when appropriate.
- Ensure good access to software such as spelling game programs using the child's own words for over-learning spellings, programs that provide on-screen word banks, talking wordprocessors.

Colour

- Use colour to distinguish between ideas. Encourage all children to use colour in their work to do this.
- Give a choice of pastel coloured paper for children to use rather than always just white.
- Use a variety of colours on the board to separate lines, sections or columns.
- Have coloured pens on tables.
- Use sticky notes in different colours. Large sizes are available.

Handout 1.9

To build self-confidence, use:

- **the language of success**

Signal confidence to the children in their ability to succeed with phrases such as 'I know you can...'

- **the language of hope**

Create an ethos where it is acceptable for children to say 'I'll try but I need some help...' rather than 'I cannot do it...'. Support this by using phrases such as 'You can do it...', and 'What helps you do it?'

- **the language of possibility**

Learners may express limits to their achievements with phrases such as 'I'm no good at...' and 'I always get X wrong'. Support a climate of greater possibility by the language you use in response, such as 'Yes, you did get it a bit mixed up but let's see which bit is causing you problems.'

(From Hughes, M. and Vass, A. (2001) *Strategies for closing the learning gap*, Network Educational Press)

