

What is dyslexia?

There is not one, agreed definition of what dyslexia is- even amongst experts!

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that mainly affects the development of literacy and language related skills. It is likely to be present at birth and to be life-long in its effects. It is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed, and the automatic development of skills that may not match up to an individual's other cognitive abilities.

The British Dyslexia Management Board October 2007

- *Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.*
- *Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.*
- *Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.*
- *It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.*
- *Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.*

Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties. (Rose Report 2009)

Why do we not have a specific test for dyslexia?

- Teachers are not qualified to test for dyslexia; only Educational Psychologist can do this
- Commercial dyslexia screening tests tend to be unreliable and have been shown to give both false positive and false negative results
- It would be wrong to label a young child with a diagnosis, as all children develop at a different rate.

What do we do instead?

- Over time, school collects a wealth of assessment information through written work, observation of the child, test results etc.
- If it is felt that the child is making less than expected progress in English despite receiving additional support/ interventions, the school may begin to carry out further assessment (based on classroom observations and more formal tests) to build up a profile of the difficulties faced by the child.
- We use a range of test such as the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS) to give us an idea of the child's receptive language levels; Single Word Reading Test (SWRT) to assess the ability to decode words; Schonell spelling test to assess accurate spelling; as well as a range of informal tests provided in the Nottinghamshire Dyslexia Friendly Schools guide.
- Some of these test provide an age-equivalent score whilst other simply highlight strengths/ weaknesses in certain areas (e.g. digit recall, visual acuity)
- This allows us to put support in place that will help to reduce these difficulties, **but it will not be a 'cure.'**

Dyslexia friendly teaching strategies:

These benefit the whole class, not just children with dyslexic tendencies! Class teachers will:

- Read all information aloud for the whole class
- Break information/ instructions down into manageable steps
- Combine verbal and visual information
- Reduce the amount of text that children are expected to copy from the board
- Use writing templates/ frames to support organisation
- Provide key vocabulary word mats
- Use a font such as Comic Sans, Sassoon or Arial
- Use a coloured background on the board

Specific interventions:

If a child is suspected of having significant literacy difficulties, the following specific strategies may be used for individual children:

- Coloured overlays/ reading rulers
- Exercise books with coloured pages
- Nessy Reading and Spelling
- Nessy Fingers (touch typing)
- Beat Dyslexia books
- SNIP
- Toe-by-Toe

Dyslexia Friendly Schools Award:

- St Mary's will be working towards gaining this award this year
- It is a whole school approach to making the curriculum accessible to everyone with literacy difficulties
- It is primarily about providing all learners with quality first teaching in a dyslexia friendly way
- It will raise the profile of learning differences amongst children in school and highlight both strengths and weaknesses

If you have any further questions about how we support children with their learning differences, please contact the school SENDCo (Mrs Turner).