

SEND & INCLUSION · GRADES 1–6

Dyslexia-Friendly Classroom

A practical guide

What dyslexia is

Dyslexia is a specific learning difference affecting reading, writing and spelling — particularly in HOW the brain processes the sounds of language (phonological processing). It is unrelated to intelligence. The key features:

- Difficulty with phonological awareness (hearing and manipulating sounds)
- Slow or laboured reading (decoding takes all the cognitive effort)
- Poor spelling that doesn't improve with practice the way it does for others
- Often strong oral language and ideas — a gap between what they CAN say and what they CAN write
- Family history common (it's heritable)

Dyslexia affects roughly 10% of children to some degree, with around 4% having severe dyslexia.

What dyslexia ISN'T

Not low intelligence Dyslexic children often score AVERAGE or ABOVE on cognitive tests. The gap between reading and thinking is the diagnostic feature.	Not 'seeing words backwards' Common myth. Most dyslexic children don't see letters reversed. The difficulty is at the level of SOUNDS.
Not laziness Dyslexic children often work HARDER than peers and produce LESS. The disparity is the source of frustration, not the cause.	Not something they grow out of Dyslexia is lifelong. With good support, dyslexic adults read fine and lead successful lives.

Adjustments that genuinely help

Adjustment	Reason
Cream/buff paper or coloured overlays	Reduces visual stress for many



Adjustment	Reason
Sans-serif font, 12pt+, 1.5 spacing	Reduces visual crowding
Read questions aloud (math, science)	Reading load \neq subject load
Audiobooks for class novels	Comprehension grows even when decoding can't keep up
Word banks for writing tasks	Reduces working memory load
Don't penalise spelling outside English	Spelling errors in science don't reflect understanding
Allow scribed answers occasionally	Captures thought when writing is the bottleneck
Voice-to-text for longer pieces	Get the ideas out, edit later
Pre-teach vocabulary	Reduces decoding load in lessons
Avoid round-robin reading	Public failure deepens shame

What dyslexic children DON'T need

Some well-intentioned strategies don't help and can harm: • **MORE READING PRACTICE OF THE SAME KIND.** If decoding is the difficulty, more decoding without strategy doesn't help. Specialist phonics intervention does. • **PUNISHMENT FOR SPELLING ERRORS.** • **'JUST LOOK MORE CAREFULLY.'** The problem isn't visual attention; it's phonological processing. • **GETTING THE 'GIFTED' LABEL TAKEN AWAY.** Dyslexia and giftedness coexist often. • **PUBLIC READING ALOUD WITHOUT WARNING.**

The long view

Dyslexic children who get good support in primary often have minimal academic difficulties later. Many become passionate readers as adults — the cognitive demands of fluent reading do reduce, even if processing remains different. What predicts good outcomes: • Early identification (don't wait for them to 'fall behind') • Specialist phonics intervention (any DfE-validated systematic synthetic phonics programme, plus targeted approaches like Toe by Toe for older children) • Continued access to age-appropriate content via audio/scribing • Self-image preserved — they didn't 'decide they were stupid' The single most damaging thing a school can do is let a dyslexic child conclude they're not clever. The learning will catch up. The self-image won't — at least not without years of work.

