

## Dyslexia – keeping it manageable

In the Preparatory School, we aim to provide every dyslexic child with a learning environment that is in accordance with latest research, is manageable for the teacher, and most importantly, develops the child's skills and strategies to optimize his or her learning i.e. enables them to grow as a learner.

Dyslexia is a huge issue in New Zealand, and its biggest challenge is self-esteem. An estimated one in ten New Zealanders are dyslexic and, with 70,000 dyslexic school children in our education system, dyslexia is often at the root of many education difficulties, resulting in failure to achieve despite potential.

If addressed appropriately, dyslexia can be a creative gift – and many talented and gifted children (and adults) are in fact dyslexic. If not addressed correctly, it can become a major factor in social dysfunction, leading to alienation, anti-social behaviour, depression and even suicide.

Research shows that between 30-40% of serious offenders in prisons have dyslexia. Addressing dyslexia through school can become a powerful catalyst for social change.

Identification, intervention and classroom adjustments for dyslexic children will help to make a difference by:

- Demonstrating empathy, respect and understanding
- Building relationships
- Identifying the various social and learning needs of the child who does not easily access learning
- Keeping the child happy and connected
- Personalising the learning
- Promoting and supporting self-efficacy
- Building home and school partnerships
- Ensuring the transition to school is well managed and is as successful as possible
- Changing benchmarks and expectations to remove stress out of the learning
- Celebrating the child's strengths

### Some Ideas

- **Give thought to seating and lighting** - some children may need a well-lit position near the teacher and near any visual aids. Note that fluorescent lights can cause visual disturbance so some students may find reading difficult if sitting directly underneath one
- **Keywords are available** around the classroom relating to the current topic(s). This enables students to access common words and include them in their writing without having to labour over spelling. This makes it easier for students to maintain their train of thought.
- **Resources are clearly labelled in a friendly font** – this should be an uncomplicated font and larger than usual. Double spacing of lines also makes reading easier

- **Use buff or coloured paper to replace white.** Many students find white paper glares and makes reading more difficult.
- **Provide alternatives to copying information from the whiteboard** e.g. handouts or send information electronically or upload to a shared site. Copying information from the board can be very stressful and tiring for some students.
- **Avoid A5 size handouts** if possible as the small size text can be hard to read, making processing and comprehension of information very difficult
- **Use black or dark markers when writing on a whiteboard** – avoid using red or green markers as many students cannot read these colours
- **Reduce background noise and distractions.** If a student is not entitled to a reader/writer during tests they should be allowed to sit in another room if distractions are evident. A short break in the middle, or breaking the test into two parts to be sat on different days can also be very beneficial for dyslexia students
- **A well organised structured learning environment** will also, among other benefits, help reduce distractions
- **Use a range of teaching techniques.** Try to vary tasks so that it is not dominated by reading and writing
- **Set clear lesson objectives.** Students need to have a purpose for their learning and will respond better when they know why they are doing something
- **Homework, if given at all,** should include reinforcement of basic skills, clear instructions and supporting material. Make homework manageable and simple and include the family in the communication loop
- **Link learning tasks to previous knowledge.** This is about creating ‘building’ blocks which show how new things relate to previous lessons. Dyslexic processors often require additional exposure to new learning to make these links and retain understanding so that they can retrieve information and apply to other settings and tasks
- **Reinforce and check understanding.** This also relates to ‘scaffolding’ and showing the relationships between learning. Students need to be clear that it is ok to ask if they haven’t understood something – it is likely others will be in the same position
- **Use differentiation to provide opportunities for success.** This involves differentiation by outcome as well as task. “By outcome” means setting different activities for students based on their levels of achievement. “By task” means setting the same activity for all students but giving them the choice as to how they demonstrate their learning, for example by oral submissions, storyboards, mindmaps, flowcharts etc. This latter differentiation will dovetail into setting out alternative evidence of achievement
- **Accept work in different forms.** Again this relates to differentiation and being prepared to look beyond traditional written material and accept other formats
- **Technology can be a dyslexic student’s best friend,** enabling them to use visual strategies or overcome handwriting or spelling difficulties. A laptop to write, a dictaphone to record work and ideas, etc
- **Promote self-esteem** in dyslexic students through praise for effort and achievement. Praise should be task-specific, for example, “I really like the way you have set out your page” rather than a generic “well done”
- **Encourage the students to take a role of responsibility** that showcases a strength that they have. If the expectation is for the child to read or give feedback to the whole class, give them

warning a few days prior so they have a chance for adequate practice. Don't put them on the spot. If they are resistant do not insist

- **Remember that there is no failure, only feedback.** If the strategy being used is not succeeding, try something different. Reflect on results, consider why expectations have not been met and, if need be, change the strategy
- **Exercise** – daily fitness and regular 'brain breaks' between lessons can help refresh learning and help pupils to focus
- **Remember that a dyslexic child has to work exceptionally hard** to try and catch up or stay with the rest of the class. Give them some down time to recharge or structure activities so they are not required to work at their maximum all the time. Structure the day with easy tasks interspersed with more difficult ones

### **In Summary**

Many of the dyslexic children in the school will have a formal educational assessment/report (a copy will be in each student's file). Please read through this information and be familiar with the content.

Some of the students will have an SLD tutor. Please be familiar with the strategies being used by the tutor so you can support this learning on a daily basis.

Dyslexic children are generally bright, articulate and creative. We must embrace these qualities and foster them.

**Dyslexic children should have access to computers for writing, this includes writing assessments.**

**Homework should be limited**

Individual Learning Plans need to be kept simple yet clear (1 page) and include targeted bullet points, and dates for review and/or discussion with parents and tutors (where applicable).

Jonathan Bierwirth  
Principal

February 2013