

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that affects the ability to read and spell. About 60% of children with dyslexia also have trouble with the sounds that make up words.

Dyslexia can also cause difficulty with basic maths (especially the order of numbers and multiplication tables), general literacy skills, word interpretation and perception, organisational skills, short term memory, sequencing and processing information. Children with dyslexia, however, are often very creative and able in certain areas of the curriculum, such as art, design, technology, computing, drama and lateral thinking.

Dyslexia is a complex neurological disorder and affects about ten per cent of the population, across all levels of intellectual ability. It tends to affect boys more than girls and often runs in families. It is believed to have a genetic cause.

Did you know that one in three American entrepreneurs have dyslexia? There are many advantages to being dyslexic. Firstly, people with dyslexia often see things more holistically or they see the 'bigger picture'. They miss the trees but see the forest. "It's as if people with dyslexia tend to use a wide-angle lens to take in the world, while others tend to use a telephoto, each is best at revealing different kinds of detail." Matthew H. Schneps, Harvard University.

They are good at finding the odd one out. People with dyslexia excel at global visual processing and the detection of impossible figures. Scientist Christopher Tonkin described his unusual sensitivity to "things out of place." Scientists in his line of work must make sense of enormous quantities of visual data and accurately find black hole anomalies. There are so many people with dyslexia in the field of astrophysics that it prompted research at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Findings confirmed that those with dyslexia are better at identifying and memorizing complex images. People with dyslexia have the ability to see how things connect to form complex systems, and to identify similarities among multiple things. Such strengths are likely to be of particular significance for fields like science and mathematics, where visual representations are key. "I recognized that I had dyslexia and then I realized I had this gift for imaging. I live in a world of patterns and images, and I see things that no one else sees. Because of dyslexia, I can see these patterns."

"You can't overcome it (dyslexia); you can work around it and make it work for you, but it never goes away. That's probably a good thing, because if dyslexia went away, then the other gifts would go away too." Beryl Benacerraf, M.D., Physician, World-renowned radiologist and expert in ultrasound. Many people with dyslexia demonstrate better skills at manipulating 3D objects in their mind. Many of the world's top architects and fashion designers have dyslexia.

People with dyslexia tend to think in pictures rather than words. Research at the University of California has demonstrated children with dyslexia also have enhanced picture recognition memory. Nineteenth-century French sculptor, Auguste Rodin, could stare at paintings in museums by day and paint them from memory at night. His dyslexia meant he could barely read or write by the age of 14, with his reading skills developing much later.

People with dyslexia have better peripheral vision than most, meaning they can quickly take in a whole scene. Although it can be hard to focus in on individual words, dyslexia seems to make it easier to see outer edges.

James Howard Jr., a professor of psychology at the Catholic University of America, described in the journal *Neuropsychologia* an experiment in which participants were asked to pick out the letter T from a sea of letter L's floating on a computer screen. Those with dyslexia identified the letter more quickly.

Many of the world's most creative actors have dyslexia, such as Johnny Depp, Keira Knightly and Orlando Bloom. Picasso was described by his teachers as "having difficulty differentiating the orientation of letters". Picasso painted his subjects as he saw them – sometimes out of order, backwards or upside down. His paintings demonstrated the power of his imagination, which was perhaps linked to his the inability to see written words properly.

Those with dyslexia are well known for having sudden leaps of insight that solve problems with an unorthodox approach. This is an intuitive approach to problem solving that can seem like daydreaming.

Key Characteristics:

A dyslexic child may:

- Use bizarre spellings and have poor phonological awareness.
- Frequently lose their place when reading and see blurred or distorted word shapes. This is usually caused by Visual Stress (also known as Scotopic Sensitivity, or Irlen Syndrome).
- Confuse some high frequency words e.g. saw/was.
- Reverse letters and number digits beyond the age where it is normal.
- Write words with correct letters in the wrong order.
- Write sequences of letters and numbers in reverse.
- Have difficulty in remembering a word and substitute other words instead.
- Have great difficulty organising themselves and their belongings.
- Be unable to remember simple sequences such as days of the week.
- Experience problems following oral instructions.
- Have poor sense of time and direction.
- Make frequent errors when copying, especially from the board.
- Have some coordination difficulties.
- Have low levels of motivation and self-esteem.

Strategies we use in the Classroom

We may need to:

- Teach syllable count to help the child hear how many syllables are in a word.
- Teach how to blend syllables.
- Teach onset and rime to help the child to discriminate between word aurally.
- Teach phoneme discrimination to help the child identify phonemes in words.
- Teach phoneme blending to help the child with reading and spelling.
- Use multi-sensory methods to support the child's learning.

- Ensure repetition of learning, using word and language games for enjoyment.
- Make use of coloured overlays and line trackers where necessary.
- Create a positive reading environment with opportunities to listen to stories.
- Teach keyboard skills and encourage use of spell-checkers.
- Encourage alternative methods of recording e.g. writing frames, diagrams, labelled drawings, flow charts, comic strip stories.
- Allow the use of a scribe where appropriate, especially for copying anything important such as homework instructions.
- Make use of audio-visual aids.
- Keep oral instructions brief and clear.
- Revise and review previously taught skills at frequent intervals.
- Raise self-esteem and confidence with lots of praise and encouragement.

Specific Interventions that we may use at Claremont School

1. The Turnabout Programme.
2. Lexia
3. Nessy
4. Sound Progress
5. Toe by Toe
6. Stairway to Spelling
7. Write On Line
8. Clicker 6
9. Suggest that the child visits an ophthalmologist.

Useful websites:

www.dyslexia.org

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

www.westkentdyslexia.org.uk

www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk (They have a centre in Tonbridge for assessments & tuition)

www.speld-sa.org

www.dyslexic.com (for wide range of resources)

www.dyslexiahelp.co.uk

www.patoss-dyslexia.org

Free Audio Libraries that school & parents can sign up to:

www.calibre.org.uk

Oxford Owl Library (Text alongside audio)

Books in SEN department:

Practical Guide to Dyslexia, J Bligt

Visual Dyslexia, I Jordan

Dyslexia Contact – official magazine for British Dyslexia Association kept in SEN dept.