



AchieveAbility Interventions: A Framework for Whole Class Learning drawn from SpLD Work

Checklist for signs of SpLD

Many learners with SpLD remain unrecognised and, even where teachers suspect that a learner may have a learning difference, access to an assessment and full diagnosis may not be straightforward. The aim of the AchieveAbility Interventions Framework Checklist for Signs of SpLD is to enable teachers and practitioners to feel more confident in recognising possible specific learning differences.

This checklist is drawn from a variety of recognised screening tools for identification of possible SpLD. Many of the existing lists and tools are extremely useful and further information can be found in the additional resources section and CD ROM accompanying the Interventions Framework.

Suggested use of the checklist:

Teaching staff can initially look at the first group of questions (no 1-10) applying them to the learners in their class to see if any of the descriptors seem to fit particular learners.

Following this, where an individual is identified as possibly having an SpLD, teaching staff can continue with the remainder of the checklist questions for this learner.

Even if teachers already have information about SpLD learners in the class it is advisable to use the checklist first and to then compare the results against any information received previously.

Once the checklist questions are completed 'yes' answers can be related to the three columns linking responses to a particular SpLD (shaded boxes indicate which difficulties indicate which SpLD). The responses can also be compared to the information about Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and Dyscalculia following the checklist.

It may not be possible for teaching staff to complete this checklist without further observation or the opportunity to talk it through with other key staff. A professional judgement will need to be made, by teachers, about the point at which they feel information leads to a significant "at risk" conclusion about particular learners.

The checklist is not a "scientific" instrument but rather a general guide. Its purpose in the context of the AchieveAbility Interventions Framework is to help teachers identify those learners for whom the delivery of practice from the teaching and learning checklist may have the most positive impact. It may also be a helpful indicator of learners who require additional support to progress in learning and/or who could benefit from referral to an SpLD specialist.

Checklist for possible presence of a Specific Learning Difference

	Dyslexia	Dyspraxia	Dyscalculia
Are you concerned about the progress of this learner in comparison with their oral skills or ability in other areas?			
Is the learner able to explain things orally, but not in writing?			
Does the learner misinterpret social cues?			
Does the learner have difficulty with maths, maths language, and maths concepts?			
Does this learner have difficulty with fine motor skills and physical co-ordination?			
Does the learner reverse numbers?			
Does the learner have difficulty with simple calculations?			
Is the learner's reading much more advanced than their writing?			
Is there a marked discrepancy between intellectual potential or practical ability and the acquisition of skills? (which skills- literacy, practical and/or numeracy?)			
Is the learner able to learn information presented in one way, but not in another? For example, do they learn when presented with things visually rather than when presented orally?			
Does the learner have a short attention span and/or difficulty maintaining focus in particular subject areas?			
Does the learner seem impulsive?			
Does the learner misinterpret language and/or have poor comprehension of what is said?			
Does the learner find it difficult to memorise particular information?			
Does the learner have difficulty following a schedule, being on time, or meeting deadlines?			
Does the learner get lost undertaking a task?			
Does the learner often misread?			
Does the learner often miscopy?			
Does the learner perform similar tasks with different success rates from day to day?			

Does the learner confuse similar letters or numbers, reverse them, or confuse their order?			
Does the learner have difficulty following small print, and/or following columns?			
Does the learner have difficulty writing ideas on paper?			
Does the learner reverse or omit letters, words, or phrases when writing?			
Does the learner have difficulty completing standard forms correctly? e.g. application/enrolment forms			
Does the learner have persistent problems with sentence structure, writing mechanics, and organising written work?			
Does the learner spell the same word differently in one document?			
Does the learner have trouble using numbers?			
Does the learner have trouble remembering addresses?			
Does the learner confuse right and left, up and down?			
Does the learner have difficulty following directions, especially multiple directions?			
Does the learner appear to be poorly coordinated?			
Is the learner unable to tell you what has just been said?			
Does the learner hear sounds, words, or sentences imperfectly or incorrectly?			

The checklist for signs of SpLD is taken from the AchieveAbility Interventions publication stage 1, on pages 24-25. This resource can be utilised as it is or in its original form from the publication, which can be purchased from the AchieveAbility National Network www.achieveability.org.uk.

Definitions: The section provides summary definitions of SpLD for reference purposes

Dyslexia - an overview (drawn from "*A Framework for Understanding Dyslexia*" DfES 2004)

The word 'dyslexia' comes from the Greek 'dys-', meaning difficulty with, and '-lexia', meaning words or language.

There are many reasons why people find it difficult to learn to read, write, or spell. For many such people, those difficulties can be explained by the normal range of opportunity and experience.

For others, however, those difficulties do not seem so easily explainable. Such learners may be'dyslexic'. We understand dyslexia to be a specific difficulty, typically characterised by an unusual balance of skills. Dyslexia affects information processing (receiving, holding, retrieving and structuring information) and the speed of processing information. It therefore has an impact on skills such as reading, writing, using symbols and carrying out calculations. However, there are many differing definitions; dyslexia is an umbrella term.

It is important to recognise that:

- dyslexia is not related to intelligence and can occur in severe, moderate, or mild forms
- people with dyslexia have their own individual profiles of strengths and weaknesses; no two people are exactly the same and the impact of dyslexia on each individual is different
- dyslexia does not only affect literacy skills such as spelling, but most of what we know about it relates to its relationship to language and literacy
- dyslexia may overlap with related conditions such as dyspraxia or attention-deficit disorder (with or without hyperactivity) and dysphasia (total or partial loss of verbal language)
- most people appear to be born with dyslexia, although others acquire it through accident or illness
- many people with dyslexia have a family member with the same condition
- some researchers think that dyslexia affects more men than women; others think that roughly the same numbers of males as females are affected.

Dyslexia is legally recognised as a disability under SENDA legislation and the Disability Discrimination Act. However it can be looked at in another way - all learners have different ways of learning, and not everyone accepts that dyslexic learners are disabled.

Dyspraxia - an overview (drawn from the Dyspraxia Foundation www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

Developmental dyspraxia is an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement. It is an immaturity in the way that the brain processes information, which results in messages not being properly or fully transmitted.

The term dyspraxia comes from the word praxis, which means 'doing, acting'. Dyspraxia affects the planning of what to do and how to do it. It is associated with problems of perception, language and thought.

Dyspraxia is thought to affect up to ten per cent of the population and up to two per cent severely. Males are four times more likely to be affected than females. Dyspraxia sometimes runs in families. There may be an overlap with other learning differences or related conditions such as Attention Deficit Disorder.

Other names for dyspraxia include Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD), Perceptuo-Motor Dysfunction, and Motor Learning Difficulties. It used to be known as Minimal Brain Damage and Clumsy Child Syndrome. Statistically, it is likely that one child is affected in every class of 30 children.

The experience of people with dyspraxia may vary as widely as those with dyslexia, but they will usually encounter a combination of difficulties that may include any of the following.

- **Motor co-ordination skills:** Poor balance / poor posture and fatigue. Clumsy gait and movement and a lack of manual dexterity. Poor hand to eye co-ordination.
- **Perception:** Poor visual perception, lack of spatial relationships awareness / inadequate sense of direction. Little sense of time, speed, distance or weight.
- **Learning, thought and memory:** Difficulty with the planning and organising of thought / and concentration. Poor memory. Problems with maths, reading and spelling and writing. Difficulty in following instructions.
- **Speech and language:** difficulty with the content, clarity and sequence of language.
- **Emotion and behaviour:** difficulty in listening to people/ picking up non-verbal signals or judging tone or pitch of voice. Tendency to take things literally and difficulty in adapting to situations.

Many of these characteristics are not unique to people with dyspraxia and not even the most severe case will have all the above characteristics. But adults with dyspraxia will tend to have more than their fair share of co-ordination and perceptual difficulties. (University of Oxford Equal Opportunities information)

Dyscalculia - An overview (drawn from www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/tutors/expertcolumn/dyscalculia/)

There are many interpretations of dyscalculia, however respected authorities in this field such as Butterworth, Sharma, Miles and Chinn agree that the nature of dyscalculia rests with the inability to see, handle and understand numbers. The inability occurs at the concrete level but especially at the abstract level.

Many learners have difficulty learning mathematics for a variety of reasons. Not all of these learners have dyscalculia. However, there are some basic areas of mathematical activity in everyday life that may indicate a dyscalculic tendency if persistently difficult and frustrating for a person.

In very simple terms, analogous to dyslexia - which is dysfunction in the reception, comprehension, or production of linguistic information - dyscalculia can be defined as the dysfunction in the reception, comprehension, or production of quantitative and spatial information.

Dyscalculia is a collection of symptoms of learning disability involving the most basic aspect of arithmetical skills. On the surface, these relate to basic concepts such as: telling the time, calculating prices and handling change, and measuring and estimating things such as temperature and speed.

Dyscalculia is an individual's difficulty in conceptualizing numbers, number relationships, outcomes of numerical operations and estimation. Dyscalculia manifests in a person as difficulty with:

- Mastering arithmetic facts by the traditional methods of teaching.
- Dealing with exchange of money, handling a bank account, giving or receiving change, and tipping.
- Learning abstract concepts of time, direction, schedules, telling / keeping track of time, and the sequence of past or future events.
- Acquiring spatial orientation, space organisation, direction, reading maps, and grappling with mechanical processes.
- Learning musical concepts, following sports sequencing or rules, keeping track of scores or players during games such as cards and board games.
- Sequencing, following directions, reading numbers out of order, substitutions, reversals, omissions and doing operations backwards.
- Organizing detailed mathematical information, remembering specific facts or formulas for completing calculations.

Dyscalculia can be quantitative, which is a difficulty in calculating; or qualitative, which is a difficulty in conceptualizing mathematics processes; or mixed, which is the inability to integrate quantity and space.