

Supporting SEND students in the classroom

Introduction

Around 20% of the general population in the UK have SEND. Only 7% of school age children attend independent schools. The 2016 ISC Census showed that 13.2% of children in ISC schools have SEND, in 2017 this rose slightly to 13.7% and by 2018 it was 15%. This will have some bearing on the population at your school, but not all ISC schools have competitive entrance exams which will skew the results. New categories of SEND were introduced in the 2018 census

Nevertheless, some students of all ages at ISC schools have SEND and need to be helped appropriately in all aspects of their education and daily lives, for SEND is not just an issue for the classroom. People with SEND will experience difficulties throughout their lives, they will not be cured, but they can be taught strategies around problems and, indeed, sometimes, turn problems into strengths.

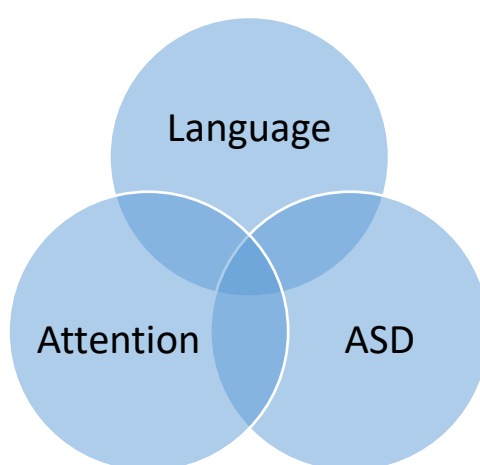
This special support is something that all the teaching and boarding staff, not just those in the Learning Support Department, should be involved in. It is a shared responsibility, in the same way as the welfare of each individual student is a shared responsibility.

So a whole school, whole staff approach is a vital part of supporting students with SEND.

Diagnosis and assessment

The label that a child carries is but a shorthand starting point and has little real value especially in the classroom. Paediatricians and some Educational Psychologists may be able to diagnose a child's special needs or disabilities and some students at your school may have been so diagnosed. Even those professionals are often reluctant to label a child unless it is in the best interests of the child so to do, for instance, if they are seeking funding from their Local Authority. More important are the apparent needs of that child and we can all, as practitioners, recognise needs as they present themselves. We will also observe traits which might make us wonder if that student has a recognised

disability and although it is not up to us to voice such a diagnosis, we can see if it helps the student if we subtly respond to his needs as if such a diagnosis has been made. Those needs are not fixed and change with time. It is very unlikely that a child will present with just one specific problem, such as poor spelling. Most children with SEND will have an assemblage of needs. In the example below, describing a particular SEND child's profile, his/her dominant needs may move from subset to subset as he/she matures or as the demands of the subjects change.



The degree of need at some schools will not be as severe as that of a student who may be attending a special school and many students will have developed their own coping strategies which may work for some of the time, but those students may need more help when they begin to study a new subject or more complex topic, or simply grow older and are less sure of themselves.

Supporting all SEND students

We cannot generalise easily, for all students, SEND or not, are individuals with slightly different needs and outlook on life.

However, it is possible that SEND students may have had a previously less than happy experience of schooling. They may lack self-belief and lack self-confidence and be self-conscious. They need to feel that they are understood and that you have the highest expectations for them in spite of their difficulties which you acknowledge, but neither teacher nor student will ever use those difficulties as an excuse for lower than expected outcomes. It is useful if they have a member of staff whom they trust and can talk to about their problems and discuss practical targets which will help them to overcome their difficulties step by small step. They should always look forward rather than bemoaning mistakes they have made. Although a stepwise process is ideal, this does not mean spoon-feeding, they should always be challenged and helped to take control of their own education, with their tutor acting as a facilitator.

They will need understanding and encouragement. They will need a classroom where the other students have an empathy for them and where there is no ridicule for the many mistakes they will make because of their difficulties.

Ideally, they should have the choice of a broad curriculum and benefit from studying subjects at which they will succeed because they interest them rather than studying subjects which they find difficult and at which they do badly. From subjects that interest them will their career path flow. Additionally, they will may need careful individualised teaching in the core subjects to ensure that they succeed in them as well.

Self-awareness is a sensitive issue, especially when dealing with children who have not been formally diagnosed but those who have been assessed and helped to understand their difficulties are usually relieved and approach their problems with renewed vigour and determination to overcome them.

Good relationship with parents should be encouraged and, if possible, parents working alongside teachers, helping students through encouragement and the practising of skills will enhance learning.

Research on all aspects of SEND is done internationally and the provision for SEND students is mainly through inclusion in most countries, and it is inclusion

with a little support from the learning support staff which is the current provision available for SEND students available at most ISC schools.

It is vital that we remember that although two students may carry similar diagnoses, the methodologies to which they might respond will be unique to each individual and may be different in different subjects.

Teaching SEND children is often exciting and always demanding. It requires flexibility and often requires the teacher to think on his/her feet, perhaps, completely changing the thrust or even the topic of the lesson.

And don't forget the positives:

All SEND children will have strengths and as much time, energy and enthusiasm should be put in to helping them develop their strengths as is put in to supporting any difficulties.

SEND children think differently and our rapidly changing world needs people who are able to think differently and offer a different skills set.

What follows are a few suggestions of ways to support the different categories of SEND which might be found in your classroom. There is also much useful material ranging from Learned Papers to everyday life skills support, on the Web.

Supporting ASD students

Background

Autism is a neurological disorder which affects the development of social and communication skills. Around 1% of the population are ASD, but this is disputed and rising. Boys 3x or 4X more likely than girls to be affected. Two main categories:

1. Aspergers syndrome – mild end of the spectrum. Find it hard to read social signals which may mean they suffer high levels of anxiety and confusion. May have language processing difficulties.
2. Autism spectrum disorder very wide range from only slightly obsessive and “boring” to having no language and hugely complex difficulties.

Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD or PDD-NOS) is a category of disorders, not a diagnostic label, where these disorders may lead to an ASD diagnosis.

6.0% of SEND pupils in ISC schools have ASD.

Possible difficulties

Understanding body language and other social cues. Hard to read between the lines. May follow language literally.

Wants to follow rules to the letter, problems when others are more flexible.

Sharing or working with a partner

Making eye contact but if he is not looking it does not mean he is not listening

Social interactions, making friends, initiating contact appropriately, the “give and take of conversation”, inclined to make speeches rather than respond to the needs of the other person,

Obsessive interests

More easily overloaded

Hard to engage in topics which do not interest them.

Dislikes change, can make him very anxious

Hypersensitive to noise, taste, touch, may lead to a limited diet or problems with fabrics.

May be controlling of peer group or, more likely, family.

BUT

Can have significant strengths, usually in a limited specialised field of study.

Can have significant cognitive strengths, may be able to focus on some favoured tasks without breaks in concentration.

May be very good at some subjects such as Maths, Computer Science or Music and, surprisingly, Drama where they may learn to display emotion.

What to look for in the classroom and in unstructured time

Possibly a “loner” – may prefer his own company

Misread social cues and cannot understand social banter

May become the butt of jokes

Can become overloaded and stressed, especially in dealing with change

May not show empathy and cannot read texts with a sympathetic eye for characterisation and situation

Will find figurative language hard to understand and may take literally

May not read the flow of play on the sports field quickly enough or may be rule bound.

Can appear very boring as will not respond to the needs of the talker but instead make speeches about a narrow choice of subject matter.

May concentrate on the minutiae of a topic and fail to see the bigger picture.

Inference and deduction from text or orally may be difficult for him.

Some ways to help

Try to enable the student to own his routines.

Warn him of significant changes from those routines in advance.

Avoid rhetorical questions, irony and sarcasm.

Talk in shorter sentences and check understanding.

Help him to build bridges between his world and yours even if he cannot see the point of doing so.

Help him to plan the use of his time and to calendar deadlines.

Praise him for remembering when he has previously forgotten rather than denigrating him when he fails.

Remember facial expressions will not work.

Assume nothing when assessing skills. He may be outstanding at Algebra but get in a muddle over change from a shop.

Supporting Dyslexic students

Background

Between 10% to 20% of people in the UK have some degree of dyslexia. In ISC schools 45.9% of SEND students have Dyslexia. However, that figure should be treated with some caution as parents and schools find the term re-assuring and many children are given that label instead of other titles which may be less acceptable. Additionally, many dyslexics have a primary cause of underlying speech and language issues which has gone undiagnosed. Dyslexia is a specific disability which alters the way in which the brain processes written material and is typically characterised by difficulties in word recognition, spelling and decoding. It has been a recognised disability since 2003.

Possible difficulties

Problems with all aspects of literacy

Time, timing and personal organisation

Problems with order of tasks and with sequencing

Short concentration span

Short term memory issues

What to look for in the classroom

Struggles with technical terms and new vocabulary

Inability to plan and to stick to plans without support

Late for lessons and other appointments

Messy or unfinished assignments

Spending too much effort on decoding and not enough on understanding.

Can be very disorganised and lacking in self-worth which can lead to depression.

Some ways to help

Expect less written work, short answers welcomed.

Avoid note taking from screen

Don't punish for leaving stuff behind.

Discuss an activity to make sure it is understood

Look into voice activated text

Give descriptive praise as appropriate

Simplify instructions and give one at a time.

Encourage use of highlighter

Make sure text reader is available on PCs and laptops such as Texthelp's Read and Write Gold.

Give step by step instructions and ask appropriate questions to ensure understanding

Provide notes and scaffolding as needed, taking account of font and colour. Double spacing often preferred.

Pre- teach subject specific vocabulary

Help him/her to personalise his revision strategy exploring both visual and auditory methods.

Encourage reading aloud only when he is comfortable and the class empathetic.

Supporting Dyspraxic students

Background

A form of Developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD) Causes unknown but may be a disruption in which messages from the brain are transmitted through the body and through which feed -back flows, possibly through an immaturity of neuron development.

Possible difficulties

Writing poorly formed

Typing slow

Many coordination problems in sport and in daily life including self care, so might look grubby or scruffy.

In riding a bike

Spatial issues

Problems with planning and executive function

Some difficulties with speech especially when stressed.

Some difficulties in making friends or judging how to behave in company

Seems not to learn anything instinctively but skills must be taught

Can be anxious and easily distracted

Cannot do puzzles or jig-saws.

Poor posture, lumbering gait, sometimes flat footed.

[What to look for in the classroom](#)

Some trouble in Maths and in anything requiring structure

Reacts to all stimuli without discrimination

Difficulty remembering instructions

Cannot take notes from screen

Problems interpreting maps and diagrams

Difficulty with using tools in technology or apparatus in Science, may break things by mistake.

Poorly organised.

Difficulty of using a learnt skill out of the learnt situation

May grin if being told off, not being rude, the expression is outside his control

Immature Art outcomes

Difficulty in explaining his needs or in answering questions.

Might chew sleeves.

Some ways to help

PE staff can play a key role if they recognise the problem and help the student with an ongoing remedial programme. These students are unlikely to be good at traditional team games, but can excel with individual sports if encouraged to do so.

Balance bikes help pre-school children.

Get the individual attention of the student when giving instructions, use simple language with visual prompts where appropriate, give time for him to process information.

Help him/her with planning and ordering to support poor executive function.

Use closed questions where possible.

Praise effort rather than performance

Always allow more time for language to be processed.

Give short assignments so that the student can appreciate the satisfaction of completing a task.

Supporting students who have ADD/ADHD

Background

There is a collection of traits which reflect a child's neurologically based temperament: selective attention, distractibility, impulsivity and, for ADHD, hyperactivity or rather excessive restlessness. Cause is unknown but environmental factors as well as psycho-neurological ones are all cited.

Possible difficulties

Trouble paying attention and focussing, especially when they are not interested.

Impulsivity "I didn't think...." Physically or orally

Difficult organising themselves, prioritising activities, managing time, completing tasks.

Unaware of their impact on others.

Socially awkward and inappropriate.

Forgetful and late.

Interrupts

Quite sensitive which they may cover with bravado.

Poor listeners

Possible strengths

Independent thinkers

Can focus with passion on an interest.

Charisma, ability to inspire others.

Sense of humour.

Some ways to help

Seat away from distractions such as windows

Use a student's name if possible when asking a question.

Ask a simple question of a student whose attention is wandering to bring him back rather than drawing attention to his inattention.

Decrease the length of assignments in class

Alternate activities to bring varieties of stimuli

Teach self-monitoring strategies for attention and set achievable targets.

Have an agreed visual signal that tells the student that he is off task without having to disrupt the flow of the lesson so to do.

Supporting students who have language processing issues

Background

Difficulty in understanding what you hear (Receptive language issues) and/or in expressing what you want to say (Expressive language issues). Around 5% of school age children may have these problems. In ISC schools this is represented by 7.7% of SEND students. Again, there is no ready description of cause: Genetic factors and pre-natal nutrition have both been cited. Students may also be slow in processing language. Ideally, Speech and language therapists would work in conjunction with the school on individual programmes. This sort of support can be extended to support revision for exams.

Recently, there has been an upsurge in diagnosis of and interest in Auditory Processing Disorders (APD) and Central Auditory Processing Disorders (CAPD). This is an auditory deficit and affects the way in which the Central Nervous System uses auditory information. It affects listening and remembering skills.

Possible difficulties in the classroom and outside it

Social skill problems through difficulties in keeping up with the flow of conversation and contributing to it

May appear shy or distant

Can be the target of bullying

Reading and grammar problems

May also appear to be dyslexic or having ADHD

Slow to answer.

May only give very short oral answers.

Problems with syntax and grammar

Mispronouncing of words.

Poor listening skills

May be mis-diagnosed as ADD/ADHD as the slow processor may lose the thread of the lesson and appear inattentive.

Processing speed has nothing to do with intelligence.

Some ways to help

Model required response by giving a full answer when he has given a one word answer.

Give choices so that student can pick between “either or” answers.

Plan ahead by telling them that they will be called upon rather than putting them on the spot.

Give them time to respond.

Help them to learn delaying responses so that they may process their answers internally and then give answers or respond to conversation, like “Would you mind repeating the question?”

Strategies which schools might put in place which will benefit all CYPs, not just those with SEND.

All of these have been used successfully in ISC schools.

Target setting with mentor

The appointment of a mentor for each CYP might seem a daunting prospect, but if each member of staff is given a small number of students to monitor at regular intervals, it can be done. Small achievable targets that will benefit the learning of each individual student should be agreed with the student rather than imposed. In time, the student might be encouraged to set his/her own targets that should be able to be achieved within a short time scale of no more than one or two weeks depending on when the next mentoring session might take place. If the target can be published on the school’s MIS or database so that other staff may support its achievement and comment on it, that will make the whole process more powerful. Records should be kept. Targets

should be general rather than subject specific. If possible, they should be SMART.

Choice in the curriculum

All schools offer options which lead to exams in Y11 and Y13. These may have to be set within commercial staffing constraints, but if small adjustments might be made to move away from the traditional subject choices to try to take account of what SEND students in particular might be able to enjoy and succeed in rather than subjects which they might find less interesting and will possibly fail, then all students will benefit.

Examples include offering Photography to replace Art for some students, Design, Engineer, Construct instead of Engineering. Do not assume that languages are impossible for all SEND students. Some ASD children may enjoy them and become competent.

Some schools offer “taster courses” in earlier years so that sensible choices may be made later. This benefits SEND children who may find choice quite difficult.

Principal of Marginal Gains

Although there has been some dispute on the application of this methodology in the UK Cycling Team, schools that have looked at their curriculums and broken them down into smaller fragments of skills and knowledge that can be delivered in a way that each child understands both the learning journey he is on and his position in that journey, and what next must be achieved, have found that the considerable effort this places on staff has been well worthwhile, as outcomes have increased considerably, for all children, not just those with SEND.

Half termly forum

Having a routine that enables staff to raise concerns at regular intervals or to report on CYPs who have already been identified is very simple and effective.

Some schools operate a traffic light system and CYPs are discussed and moved into different areas of concern.

Assessment

Assessing students is often necessary and in Independent School Regulations, there is requirement for the school to have a recognisable way of demonstrating progress and it is good if whatever is used to assess SEND children ties in with the whole school system, but assessment is only useful if something follows as a result of that assessment. Each child has but one chance of an education and if something is not working, it does not mean that something or someone has failed, it just means that a different strategy needs to be tried.

Behaviour

Some teachers and parents worry that having SEND children in a class will negatively affect the learning of the class as a whole. It is true, that some SEND children, wrongly placed and wrongly taught, may have misbehaved in the past as they were unable to access the lesson and they might have habitualised behavioural traits which might be triggered in certain classroom situations, but so will children who have no SEND issues at all.

Behaviour has been removed as a class of SEND from the 2014 Code of Practice as practitioners have realised that if a child understands that his/her needs are being met in a supportive, yet challenging environment, then there is no need to misbehave.

It is worth remembering:

“If you treat a child as he is now, he will remain as he is now.

If you treat him as he could be and ought to be then he will become how he could be and ought to be”

J W Goethe