

Some general principles for supporting pupils' learning needs at school and at home

Celebrate the pupil's strengths and highlight what they have done well. Provide lots of positive feedback and make praise specific so they know exactly what they need to try to replicate in the future.

Ensure the pupil has had recent hearing and vision tests to make sure they are not encountering any difficulties in those areas.

Avoid asking the pupil to copy information, especially from the board. This is highly demanding on a pupil's reading, processing, memory, writing and spelling skills. Difficulties in any of these areas will make it hard for pupils to copy quickly and accurately and they will spend their mental energy on the mechanical process rather than actually taking on board the information. It also requires them to constantly shift their attention from one place to another which places further demands on their working memory skills.

Instead of copying, provide the pupil with a print-out of the information; they can then immediately start to read and think about the information, perhaps highlighting anything they feel is important or anything they do not understand.

Memory

- Break spoken information down into smaller chunks. If necessary, just give one instruction at a time.
- Repeat information as much as is needed.
- Make eye contact when giving instructions and ask the pupil to repeat what they have to do.
- Make instructions multi-sensory - give visual cues, such as pictures, gestures/signing or visual demonstration to support the verbal information.
- Recap information regularly. Link new knowledge to what has been learned before, what the pupil already knows or has experienced.
- Establish routines, specific places for resources etc.
- Try to reduce distractions eg noise/movement (some pupils may be distracted by noises that others are not aware of eg the hum of a computer/projector).
- Provide a simple task checklist / task board on the pupil's table so they can remember what they need to do to complete a task and how much is expected. They can tick off the steps as they go along.

Language

- Consider the complexity of the language being used. Use short, simple phrases.
- Check the pupil's understanding and clarify meaning where needed.
- Provide visual resources eg a sheet of key words for the lesson, with a symbol or picture for each word.
- Teach the important words for a topic before the topic begins.
- Use mind maps to write basic key information about a topic – pupils can draw pictures to help them understand.
- Check understanding by asking open ended questions after the information has been given eg tell me what you know about xxx.
- Draw attention to language links eg opposites, words that mean the same thing.
- Model good sentence structures.

Processing

- Give the pupil more time to listen and process information before expecting them to start an action/task.
- Allow additional time for answering questions – let the pupil know you will come back to them for the answer once they have had time to think.
- Use talk partner work to give the pupil time to process information before sharing with the whole class.
- Allow additional time for work in class and for homework or adapt tasks so that they can be completed in the given time.

Attention

- Many of the principles above for memory and language will also help pupils to maintain their attention.
- Set shorter tasks or break a longer task into several stages.
- Ensure the pupil has the equipment they need on their table so they do not lose focus by having to search for or wait for items.
- Consider using a timer or countdown strip to help focus. An example is provided in the Things to Do Issue 14 Resources folder.
- Quiet background music may also help focus.
- Regular movement breaks in lessons and legitimate reasons for moving around.
- Fidget toy, with clear rules for its use so that it does not distract others.

Reading

- Read written information out loud for the pupil as much as possible.
- Study buddy to help the pupil with words they are unsure of.
- Do not ask the pupil to read out loud unless they volunteer.
- Use technology if available to help make the pupil independent eg text to speech software such as ClaroRead or TextHelp Read and Write. Office 365 has a built in Read Aloud function. iPad and Android tablet Apps include ClaroSpeak which will read Word documents, ClaroPDF which will read PDFs and Claro ScanPen which will enable the pupil to take a photo of a page from a book or a worksheet and hear it read out loud.

Writing

- Support pupils with developing simple planning methods and encourage them to plan before they write.
- Provide writing frames and scaffolds, sentence/paragraph starters rather than a blank page.
- Provide word banks and personalised spelling resources on the pupil's table.
- Mark their work for content and not spelling
- Provide alternatives to writing full sentences by hand eg the pupil could write bullet points, label a diagram, fill in missing words in sentences, word process their work, speak their ideas into an iPad, dictate their ideas to an adult to write for them.
- Provide time for proof-reading and support pupils to develop skills in this area. Reading or hearing work read out loud may be helpful.

Maths

- Provide hands on and visual resources.
- Encourage jottings.
- Do not focus on speedy, automatic retrieval of facts such as times tables – instead work on developing strategies to find the answers eg Visualisation (in Things to Do Issue 6).