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# DYSLEXIA

A Guide For New Zealand Schools

  
**Dyslexia Foundation**  
of New Zealand

[www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz](http://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz)

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## Introduction

The Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand (DFNZ) has launched a new programme called 4D | For Dyslexia that aims to empower New Zealand schools to take action and make meaningful changes to help dyslexic students. Officially launched in September 2008, the programme is also designed to be collaborative and over time it is expected that resources will grow as information and best practice is shared.

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 schoolchildren 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. It is estimated that 50% of youth who find themselves in court are dyslexic or have an identifiable learning difficulty, and this flows into our adult prison population as well. Addressing dyslexia through the education system can thus become a powerful catalyst for social change.

Changing the educational environment can also create benefits for all students. Dyslexia is the 'sharp end of the stick', in that if you get the learning environment right for dyslexic students early on, it will work for and benefit others. DFNZ believes that the percentage of underqualified school leavers could be reduced by up to half simply by getting the environment right. Early intervention is critical.

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## Why We Need 4D | For Dyslexia

The Ministry of Education finally recognised dyslexia in April 2007, but the Government has not followed up on its promise to provide dyslexia funding: specifically for professional development for teachers and better resources to deal with dyslexia in the classroom.

The Ministry of Education is currently hard at work on a major literacy policy and, while the Foundation applauds this work, the literacy focus makes it very limited in scope and thus ineffective for dyslexic students – much like showing up at a car crash with a box of sticking plasters. The policy work also appears to be set against a long timeframe, making it unlikely that the dyslexia-specific funding is on the cards anytime soon. In fact, the Government seems to have conveniently forgotten its funding commitment for this.

In the absence, therefore, of funding or direction from the Government, the 4D | For Dyslexia programme from DFNZ provides guidance on concrete steps schools can take to make a difference for the 70,000 dyslexic New Zealand schoolchildren at risk of failing in the education system.

The 4D name extends the common perception of three dimensions and likens the fourth dimension to the dyslexic/alternative way of thinking that can bring creative gifts as well as some learning challenges. 4D is also an extension of the 3R's – reading, writing and arithmetic – with dyslexia represented as the creative aspect that overlays all three.

The 4D programme is also born out of a real need for change in a wider education system under pressure. The 2008 Annual Report into the compulsory schools sector in New Zealand noted that supporting students at risk of education and societal failure is one of the most pressing issues facing the education sector. In some cases, discipline issues also arise from a lack of resources to deal with students who have learning differences, like dyslexia.

Difference can in fact turn into difficulty for all involved unless educators are equipped with resources to make appropriate interventions. As dyslexia often has negative effects on self-esteem, dyslexic students appear more likely to become disruptive in class, thereby affecting the degree to which other students remain on task. As their school life progresses and they fail to succeed in the regular classroom environment, dyslexic students are likely to become more disengaged and disenfranchised, resulting in compounding emotional and social issues.

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## Why We Need 4d | For Dyslexia (continued)

DFNZ is committed to making 4D a meaningful and powerful programme for schools, and is funding a research trip to the UK in 2009 for three education professionals to explore advances made by British schools in dealing with dyslexia. From this research trip, it is expected that further valuable information and resources will be able to be incorporated into the New Zealand programme. In the interim, this guide has been produced to enable New Zealand schools to get on and make some headway.

We believe moving forward on 4D will also help schools to bring to life the vision outlined in The New Zealand Curriculum 2007. This empowers schools to design their own curriculum and allows school leaders, boards of trustees and staff to think critically about their school vision for all learners; the belief and value systems that will drive learning; and the teaching principles and practices which define learning in their school.

Inclusive and differentiated learning for all children should be fundamental to a school's curriculum design. The Government has set an ambitious vision in terms of the Curriculum and the Kiwi Leadership for Principals 2008 documents, envisaging young people who:

- are confident, connected, actively involved and equipped to be life-long learners
- are strong in the 5 competencies: thinking; using languages, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others; participating and contributing.

For the dyslexic learner to be able to achieve the vision and key competencies outlined above, the school needs to engage them in learning in a way that suits their natural predispositions and recognises that they process information in different ways. The same size will not fit all dyslexic learners, as indeed it would not fit all learners in general. All children need to be understood, accepted and valued for being who they are.

It is important that the school doesn't see dyslexia as a disability but instead views the learner as being different and in a school culture of inclusiveness and respect this difference will be celebrated and valued. Deficit thinking on dyslexia is harmful to the learner and ultimately destroys a student's self-belief and motivation to learn.

# The 4D | For Dyslexia Programme

The 4D | For Dyslexia initiative is designed to provide guidance for schools to recognise dyslexia, and to define their position and take action to address this through a three-step approach:

1. Producing a written policy statement setting out their approach to dyslexia
2. Outlining a strategy for addressing dyslexia in the classroom, including nomination of key staff to coordinate
3. Implementing the strategy, including making simple adjustments to the classroom environment

As soon as a school registers its intention to take the three steps, it will receive a 4D logo to load onto its website, along with a standard brief overview of the programme to use as a holding page while it develops its policy statement, classroom strategy and interventions. As these are developed, the school can update its website page accordingly – and also link to the special [www.4Dschools.org.nz](http://www.4Dschools.org.nz) website so that information on progress may be shared. Schools which have significant success in implementing 4D may also be invited to become case studies, to show New Zealanders the action that is being taken to help Kiwi kids that think differently.

Details on the three-step approach are set out later in this guide. Overall, a school-wide philosophy of putting inclusion at the heart of everything will enable the development of dyslexia-aware classrooms led by dyslexia-aware teachers. Adjustments to the classroom environment should be designed to create the necessary changes whilst not adding to a teacher's daily workload or stress.

Identification, interventions and classroom adjustments for dyslexic students will help to make a difference by:

- Demonstrating empathy, respect and understanding of these students
- Being proactive by building relationships with these students
- Identifying the various social and learning needs of children/ students coming into school who don't easily access learning
- Keeping these children/ students at school: happy and connected
- Personalising the learning
- Promoting and supporting self-efficacy
- Building home and school partnerships
- Ensuring the transition from preschool to school and from primary school to intermediate and high school is as successful for the child/ student as possible
- Changing benchmarks and expectations for these children to take the stress out of learning for children/ students and their families

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## The 4D | For Dyslexia Programme (Continued)

As 4D evolves over time it can embrace other learning differences and diversity. The 4D initiative will benefit other marginalised student groups like Aspergers, Attention Deficit Disorder, Dyspraxia, and ethnic students, and it will also benefit more typical learners, too. The mindset of 4D and the majority of its strategies and interventions offer transferable benefits, both direct and indirect.

The objectives for the New Zealand 4D | For Dyslexia initiative are to:

- encourage Boards of Trustees, schools and educators onto the 4D pathway resulting in a written school policy statement around being dyslexia-aware and meeting the needs of dyslexic students
- create informed and empowered parents, teachers, and dyslexic students with the aim of attaining confident self-advocacy by all dyslexic students before they leave secondary school
- provide a means of engagement with parents of dyslexic students, older dyslexic students, and educators with a passion for embracing difference
- create a structure that allows schools to benchmark their level of engagement over time and against other schools in New Zealand
- give parents information on which to base school decisions
- foster understanding and acceptance of dyslexia as an alternative way of thinking that requires specific interventions, with an important corollary of this being to create a safe environment for parents and dyslexic students to disclose their dyslexia to others when necessary

The big picture vision for 4D | For Dyslexia is to make the 4D mark as important to education as the Heart Foundation tick is to health – a sure sign of a school making a difference.

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## Defining Dyslexia

Groundbreaking Auckland University research in 2006 found that people with dyslexia appeared to be trying to read with a different part of their brains to most other people. The research meant that some popular misconceptions about dyslexia could be quashed. These included ideas that dyslexia came from poor education or behavioural, motivational or attention problems.

While dyslexia does impact literacy objectives, the dyslexic mind is reflected in much wider ways within the education system, both academically and behaviourally. Addressing dyslexia through standard literacy and numeracy interventions does not solve the problem – and could in fact make it worse, cementing students' feelings of failure.

This is because dyslexia is an alternate way of thinking, not a literacy deficit. Dyslexia impacts across a range of vectors, from literacy and numeracy right through to time management and information processing speed. In short, the universal traits of dyslexia transcend literacy alone.

Hence teachers (with appropriate professional development training) need to be able to implement student appropriate literacy and numeracy interventions in a specific way (with a changed attitude and expectation) that supports the dyslexic student and is cognisant of how their mind works.

The National Curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to embrace dyslexia-aware best practices which, because they are grounded in the psychology of learning, will benefit all learners. Embracing this approach also significantly reduces the opportunities for dyslexic students to integrate their learning experiences as failure. It is important to note that all students will learn less effectively if teachers are unable or unwilling to identify and respond to individual learning needs.

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## Defining Dyslexia (continued)

In developing the 4D programme, DFNZ has benefited from the assistance of Neil MacKay, an international dyslexia consultant who has worked with the British Dyslexia Association and Education Authorities and Departments in the UK, Hong Kong and Malta. He has provided significant advice and input in the development of the New Zealand 4D initiative, including this definition of dyslexia, which the 4D programme has adopted:

“A specific learning difference which, at any given level of ability, may cause unexpected difficulties in the acquisition of certain skills.”

This definition is deliberately short, simple and straightforward. Many current definitions are little more than descriptions and so full of exceptions, caveats and sub clauses that they are positively dyslexia unfriendly and make little sense to busy practitioners in the classroom – let alone parents and children.

As a learning difference, or arguably preference, dyslexia only becomes a difficulty when ignored, dismissed, or badly addressed.

Neil MacKay identifies an ideal school as one that would show an awareness that many children learn non-traditionally – thinking faster than they read, write, spell or do number work. These children would be encouraged to explore ideas, concepts and strategies within the framework of their preferred learning styles. A weakness in basic skills would not be seen as a reflection of intelligence – instead, intelligence would be defined by the phrase “knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do” ie. giving each child the ability and strategies to move forward when they meet a situation that is new to them.

Rather than identifying weaknesses, McKay’s ideal school is about celebrating and maximising strengths. In a nutshell, being dyslexia-aware involves:

- Finding out what children are good at
- Giving them a chance to do more of it, and
- Celebrating them doing it right



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## The Benefits of Addressing Dyslexia Early

Teachers have a vital role to play in identifying potentially dyslexic students in their first few months at school. By identifying students who show dyslexia-like tendencies early and referring them for screening when necessary, the teacher can help and assist before children begin to experience failure and frustration and integrate this as a sense of being less than others, resulting in low self-esteem and alienation.

The DFNZ Teachers' Survey 2008 indicated that nearly all education professionals have taught a dyslexic student, with most teaching between one and three students a year. Some 89 percent of respondents identified dyslexic students as having lower self-esteem than their non-dyslexic peers, and a further 41 percent said dyslexic students exhibit less socially acceptable behaviour.

While it is clear from these statistics that initiatives specific to dyslexic students will help those students personally, a separate statistic also showed that 99% of teachers felt such dyslexic-specific initiatives would also help other, non-dyslexic students.

Dyslexia initiatives like 4D help the teacher too. When teachers see that small changes to the classroom environment can create significant improvement in student engagement and behaviour, a stress is removed.

Through understanding their difference and integrating this through success in the classroom, 4D ultimately empowers dyslexic students to help themselves.

From data collected by Neil MacKay, dyslexia-aware schools in the UK are recording improvements in a range of measurable indicators, including attendance, attainment (measured through data), achievement (measured through assessment for learning), student and parental confidence, not just for dyslexic students, but also for a wide range of vulnerable learners.

This data, collected from schools engaged in the UK Quality Marking initiative – which recognises schools for the quality of their inclusive practice – shows improved attendance and punctuality once teaching styles, methods and materials are modified with a dyslexia-aware focus. This focus enables teachers to pull together a range of approaches into a coherent response, and head teachers comment that once they get it right for dyslexic students, this seems to enhance the learning of a majority of pupils in the school, with or without specific learning needs. For those with dyslexia, significant gains towards closing the learning gap have been made, with improvements recorded specifically in writing, reading, maths and science following targeted support.

Achievement through assessment for learning is probably the key indicator of success. Comparing samples of pupil work from “pre engagement” to those completed in an environment with a dyslexia-aware thrust show powerful changes. Self esteem, sampled through “pupil voice questionnaires” is also up. And anecdotal evidence from interviews with teachers indicate increases in “resilience” – the ability/willingness to work through difficulties based on earlier experiences of success.

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# Toolkits For Action

## 1. Creating a written policy statement

The first step for any school joining the 4D programme will be to create a formal written policy/ procedure statement. This demonstrates that the school has made a commitment to its dyslexic students and that the commitment is real.

This written policy/ procedure statement should set out the school's approach to dyslexia and its intentions in terms of creating a dyslexia-aware environment and effecting change for dyslexia students. This policy should cover topics such as:

- Assessment
- Monitoring and tracking
- Learning and teaching
- Marking
- Differentiation – maximising the learning environment by taking into account individual differences – such as learning speeds, styles, aptitude and motivation – and considering how activities can be adapted to cater for all needs and levels
- Securing alternative evidence of achievement\* – this involves accepting non-written work as equally valid, such as oral submissions, storyboards, mindmaps, flowcharts, powerpoint, video/digital, or even “physical theatre” where students create a living model of, for example, how tectonic plates move to cause earthquakes

\*NB: Increasingly in the UK, in particular, assessment policies are asking for alternative evidence of achievement to be required as part of the assessment process and marked/valued equally with more traditional evidence. Tracking a student's marks across a range of evidence can also indicate learning preferences and show which assessment strategies are, in reality, a barrier to achievement. Clearly the current exam situation requires traditional evidence but students who have been encouraged to present alternative evidence seem to find it easier to use this as the “springboard” for the traditional. On the other hand, past failure at traditional evidence may inhibit test/exam performance because of the baggage the student brings to the situation.

In particular the policy statement should enable schools to evaluate:

- How well dyslexic students attain and achieve
- The appropriateness of their attitudes and values
- The effectiveness of teaching and learning experiences for dyslexic students
- The quality of the school's own curriculum, recognising that the National Curriculum is not a one-size-fits-all solution and interpreting it in a way that best meets the needs of their particular students

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## 2. Strategy for implementation in classroom

The second step for a 4D school is to create a strategy for implementing its new policy throughout the school and in the classroom environment. A point person or persons, should be nominated to coordinate the 4D programme. This key staff member(s) should be part the senior management team with the authority to implement dyslexia-aware enhancements of policy and practice.

This strategy puts the detail to the policy statement and may include the following areas:

- Identification of ways to ensure that current weaknesses with basic skills do not prevent dyslexic students from working at ability appropriate levels
- Guidance on how to spot “unexpected difficulties” acquiring some skills in comparison to ability appropriate skill/concept acquisition in other areas
- Effective differentiation strategies – providing guidance for differentiation by outcome as well as task. “By outcome” means setting different activities for pupils based on their levels of achievement. “By task” means setting the same activity for all pupils 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
- Guidance for acceptance and marking of alternative evidence of achievement. Primary school teachers will have more creative licence in this area as they are not locked into the NZQA marking schedule. However, we would encourage secondary schools to explore this area and consider any changes they can make as this is an important issue for dyslexic students
- How teachers can be supported to identify and respond to the learning needs of dyslexic students without underestimating intellect



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### 3. Simple steps to implementation

The third step for schools is to implement the strategic plan. There are many simple ways to help improve the learning environment for dyslexic students and these are detailed in this section.

First of all, when looking at the classroom environment, it is important to understand the process of identifying a dyslexic child. This is a two-part process involving careful observation of students and, if necessary, formal screening.

#### The careful observation of student tendencies

There are conflicting views on the benefits of universal screening for young primary schoolchildren, however there is strong agreement about the importance of the teacher's role in identifying children in their classroom who show signs which may indicate dyslexia. By doing so, teachers can immediately start to implement small changes that can have a significant impact. Clearly, if difficulties persist, the student should be prioritised for screening and specific interventions.

There are many excellent lists of dyslexia signs, which can be accessed from the DFNZ's site [www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz](http://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz). Most lists include the following signs, usually apparent after a year at school:

- Difficulties with making letter/sound links
- Poor sense of rhyme
- Letters or numbers reversed or confused b/d/p/q, n/u, 13/31
- Difficulties with reading and recalling basic sight words
- Difficulties with spelling common words
- Difficulties with segmenting and blending sounds
- Difficulties with learning sequences eg. days of week
- Difficulties with fine motor issues – eg. difficulties with letter formation, tying laces, doing up buttons
- Disorganisation and/or difficulties following instructions
- Confusion with orientation including left and right
- Oral capability but difficulties, including at times behavioural difficulties, when requested to complete written exercises

It is important to note that all lists must be viewed against a benchmark of ability appropriate achievement in other areas. This embodies the principle of “unexpected difficulties” due to dyslexic learning differences, rather than across-the-board learning difficulties due to “global delay”. Students with global delay tend to learn most things at a slower rate and require more repetition whereas students with dyslexia usually have difficulties in specific areas.

A very good and more comprehensive guide to identifying potential dyslexia signs is provided below. This is from the UK's new "Inclusion Development Programme" from the Department for Children and Schools:

Reading	Writing	Numeracy/ Time	Skills	Behaviour/ Concentration	General
Makes poor progress with reading	Poor standard of work compared with oral ability	Confusion with number order, e.g. units, tens, hundreds	Poor motor skills – weaknesses in speed, control, accuracy	Uses work avoidance tactics such as sharpening pencils, looking for books	Speed of processing
Has difficulty blending and segmenting. (Blending = combining individual sounds together to make one word for reading. Segmenting = breaking a word into syllables for spelling)	Produces messy work with lots of crossings out, words may be tried out several times	Finds symbols confusing + / x = / - / ÷	Limited understanding of non-verbal communication	Is easily distracted	Poor concentration
Has difficulty with the structure of words – knowing where to divide into syllables, recognising prefixes and suffixes	Often confused by similar letter shapes e.g. b/d, p/g, p/q, n/u, m/w	Difficulty learning sequences e.g. times tables, days of week, months of year	Confusion of left/right, up/down, etc.	May appear to be 'dreaming' instead of listening	Difficulty following instructions
Difficulty with pronunciation of longer words	Poor handwriting with reversals and badly-formed letters	Difficulty in learning to tell the time, especially with analogue clocks	May be unsure of hand preference	May act as the class clown or be disruptive or withdrawn	Word finding difficulties

Reading	Writing	Numeracy/ Time	Skills	Behaviour/ Concentration	General
Does not recognise familiar words	Spells a word several ways in one piece of writing	Poor time keeping and awareness of time passing	Has good days and bad days	Becomes very tired due to the amount of effort and concentration required (research has shown that the dyslexic brain works four times harder than the non-dyslexic brain when processing language-based information)	Forgetful of words
Poor expression, hesitant, slow when reading aloud which can lead to poor comprehension of text and losing the point of the story	Has the right letters in a word but in the wrong order	Poor personal organisation and limited abilities to set work out clearly on a page			Does not like change e.g. a supply teacher covering for the class teacher
Cannot pick out the most important points from a passage.	Written work badly set out – wanders away from the margin	Difficulty remembering what day of the week it is, birth dates, seasons, months			
Misses out words or adds words when reading text	Uses phonetic and bizarre spelling	Difficulty with concepts e.g. yesterday, today, tomorrow, above, below, etc.			

## Screening for Dyslexia

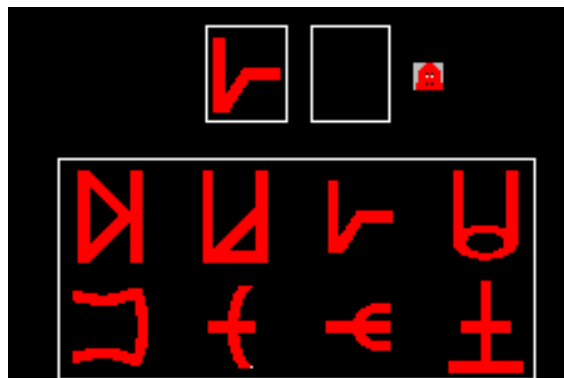
When screening has been identified as a valuable next step, the child can be screened by many different tests.

Neil MacKay, our 4D International consultant has recommended the following:

**Lucid CoPs**, released in 1996, is the leading computerised assessment system for children aged 4-8 years. A scientifically proven system for early screening of dyslexia, it is currently used by more than 6,000 schools in the UK and worldwide – including more than 300 New Zealand schools. CoPS comprises nine tests of fundamental cognitive skills that underpin learning. They enable teachers to produce a cognitive profile of a student which can greatly illuminate the individual pathways to learning success. Each test is presented as an enjoyable game. Lucid CoPs assesses the student's strengths and weaknesses in dealing with information presented in a variety of visual and auditory modalities. Suggestions for a wide variety of teaching strategies are also included.



Visual sequential & spatial memory test



Phonological awareness test

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**LASS Junior** is a multifunctional assessment system designed for children aged 8-11 years. LASS is straightforward to administer, with students completing up to eight “games”. A report is immediately available which is easy to understand and explain to parents and other staff. The report shows student attainment levels in aspects of literacy as well as cognitive readings on visual, auditory memory, phonological skills and non-verbal IQ. The Teacher Manual suggests strategies and resources in response to the reports. Pre and post testing allows teachers to measure over time how effective interventions have been.



Word Chopping (syllable segmentation) test

**LASS Secondary** is similar to the junior system and assesses the same parameters but the test modules are carefully designed and scientifically validated for children aged 11-15 years.

More detail on CoPS and LASS is available at [www.lucid-research.com](http://www.lucid-research.com). Please note, these programs do not run on MAC's.

In New Zealand, these tests can be ordered from a small number of suppliers including Lexia Learning Systems: [www.lexialearning.co.nz](http://www.lexialearning.co.nz) or [www.itecnz.co.nz](http://www.itecnz.co.nz), and the Learning Staircase: [www.learningstaircase.co.nz](http://www.learningstaircase.co.nz)



Sentence reading test

Lexia run nationwide training courses in both the use and interpretation of the tests, and provide free assistance to their clients in the analysis of individual student profiles.

### Official assessment

In terms of an official assessment of dyslexia, this can currently only be provided by a registered psychologist. For senior students this official assessment is required to be able to access assistance with exams in the form of additional time, reader-writer support, and use of a word processor. This needs to be done well in advance of sitting formal examinations (e.g. NZCEA) as there must be a track record proving the student has been using the Reader/Writer support successfully for some time. An application has to be made to NZQA for the right to use Reader/Writer.

The screening policy and process will be set by each school and a pathway created within the school structure for its effective implementation.

## Changes in the classroom

This section outlines some examples of simple adjustments that can be made in the classroom to improve the learning environment for dyslexic students. These adjustments, or fine tuning, can be made at any scale, at any time and in any priority order – according to the particular circumstances and resources of the school in question.

In considering classroom changes, it is important to remember that dyslexia is an alternative way of thinking – a learning difference which conveys both opportunities and costs. The opportunities often manifest in the form of creativity, problem solving and entrepreneurialism while the cost is often seen in unexpected difficulties in acquiring some basic literacy and/or numeracy skills. One of dyslexia's key differences is in how things are comprehended.

World dyslexia authority Sally Shaywitz, who founded the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity ([www.dyslexia.yale.edu](http://www.dyslexia.yale.edu)), notes that dyslexia is a way of thinking and being which comes from a fundamental difference in the way the brain is organised. Dyslexics tend to be top-down rather than bottom-up thinkers, meaning they learn from getting the big picture or the overall idea or meaning first, and then fill in the specific details. People with dyslexia learn best through meaning, by understanding the overall concept rather than through rote memorisation of isolated facts. Strong visualisation skills are also an asset to those with dyslexia. These observations have critical importance in terms of how information is presented to dyslexic students, and how long they are given to understand it.

In this context, fairness is not about treating each child equally, but about ensuring that each child gets their needs met. As US president Thomas Jefferson once said: "There is nothing so unfair as the equal treatment of unequal children." Arbitrary time limits, for example, can be very restrictive for dyslexic students, as they often take longer to work through the overall meaning of something before they can turn to the detail. While time limits are often necessary in the classroom, as in life, it is important to assess whether they are always truly necessary, or whether customary timeframes can be challenged.

A dyslexic-aware classroom will be one that promotes explicit teaching, careful monitoring of a child's learning, a partnership between the child, the family and the school, clear learning intentions, success criteria and regular feedback and feed forward. While feedback is traditionally focused on critiquing a piece of work in terms of what was not done correctly, feed forward is more future focused. It is about providing specific suggestions for how to do better next time, using language that is positive, affirmative and do-able", i.e. "Next time, why not try...". Overall, a dyslexia-aware classroom will provide a warm, nurturing and supportive learning environment for all learners. What makes this learning environment so crucial for the dyslexic learner is that they don't cope well unless the environment is like this. However, it is important to note that all children will benefit from this type of environment, whether they have learning differences or not.

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This list below outlines examples of changes that can make a big difference in the classroom. A great resource that expands on this is Neil MacKay's book "Removing Dyslexia as a Barrier to Achievement" available from [www.aquilabooks.co.nz](http://www.aquilabooks.co.nz). Over time, the 4D website will also provide more information and other resources that NZ schools will find helpful.

- **Attention to seating and lighting**, including the relocation of vulnerable learners to 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
- **Keywords available** around the classroom relating to the topic being taught. This enables students to access common words and include in their writing without having to labour over spelling. This makes it easier for students to maintain their train of thought
- **Resources clearly labelled in a dyslexia friendly font** – this should be an uncomplicated font and larger than usual. Double spacing of lines also makes reading easier
- **Use of buff or coloured paper to replace white**. Many students find white paper glares and makes reading more difficult. If coloured paper cannot be used, a coloured overlay may be helpful – these can be purchased in different colours from specialist optometrists though trial and error may be required to see what is best suited to each individual student
- **Providing alternatives to copying from the board** eg. handing out sheets of information. Copying from the board can be very stressful and tiring for some students. Students who finish reading the notes first can go back and highlight key points while others catch up
- **Avoidance of A5 size handouts** if possible as the small size text can be hard to read, making processing and comprehension of information very difficult
- **Usage of black or dark markers when writing on a whiteboard** – avoid using red or green markers as many students cannot read these colours
- **Reduction of 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 of multi-sensory teaching** including visible and tangible teaching aids. Try to vary tasks so that it is not always about reading and writing

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- **Setting 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,** should include reinforcement of basic skills, clear instructions and supporting material. Make homework manageable and simple and include the family in the communication loop
- **Linking 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
- **Reinforcing and checking understanding.** This also relates to 'building blocks' and showing the relationship 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
- **Using differentiation to provide opportunities for success.** As referred to earlier in the classroom strategy section, this involves differentiation by outcome as well as task. "By outcome" means setting different activities for pupils based on their levels of achievement. "By task" means setting the same activity for all pupils 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
- **Accepting 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 word process work and reinforce numeracy skills, a dictaphone to record work, and phonetic spell checkers can enable learning
- **Promotion of 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"
- **Encouragement for 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 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
- **Finally, if the student and their parents are comfortable, discuss openly with the student that you are aware they are dyslexic or think differently – and ask how best you can support them**

## Additional tools and further resources

Many schools will already have in place specific interventions for students who have clearly identified learning needs that cannot be met within the traditional classroom as regards reading, handwriting, spelling, maths, memory, coordination etc. Bringing a dyslexia-aware perspective to these can enhance them and create greater progress.

In addition to physical and environmental changes in the classroom, there are some dyslexia-specific learning interventions that can be valuable. These need to be matched appropriately to the student's needs and schools need to ensure that they are effective.

There are many programmes (computer and non-computer) which will help in supporting areas of difficulty. Talk to other schools about which ones work for them. Some are expensive but can be viewed as an investment.

Ensure Teacher-aides have adequate training and understanding of the issues and how best to tailor a programme if a child is to be removed for one-on-one support. If a programme is not working, more of the same does not work! In terms of personnel, RTLBs (Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour) and RTLits (Resource Teachers Literacy) and SENCOs (special educational needs coordinators) are also a valuable resource for schools that are engaged with the dyslexia agenda. It can also be useful to ask a known dyslexic, maybe a parent, to come and talk to staff as a whole to share their perspective on how it is for them, their experiences and things that help.

Some parents opt for support from tuition offered from outside the school. Encourage this tutoring to be done at school if possible and in school time. Thus it isn't seen as a punishment by the child in having to do it in "their own time". Also, the child is fresh and not tired after a day at school.

Many of these interventions provide significant benefit to the student and the student's family and the dyslexia-aware classroom teacher will acknowledge this and help integrate any new learnings back into the classroom environment.

The DFNZ website is designed to provide the most comprehensive and up-to-date reference for organisations which provide understanding, tools and skills to enable dyslexic individuals to address learning and other differences. More on this can be found on the Solutions & Assessments page at [www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz](http://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz)

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## Framework for Measuring Progress

You'll notice the difference these tools and suggestions make straight away, but it's important that everybody else can see the progress you've made too. Making the changes and improvements transparent and celebrating them will create pride in staff and students, let parents know about the good work you're doing, inspire other schools and help DFNZ in their attempts to get government action on dyslexia. That's why you should keep DFNZ updated as to how 4D is working at your school. Providing evidence of how these strategies are impacting on student learning, as well as narrative, is important.

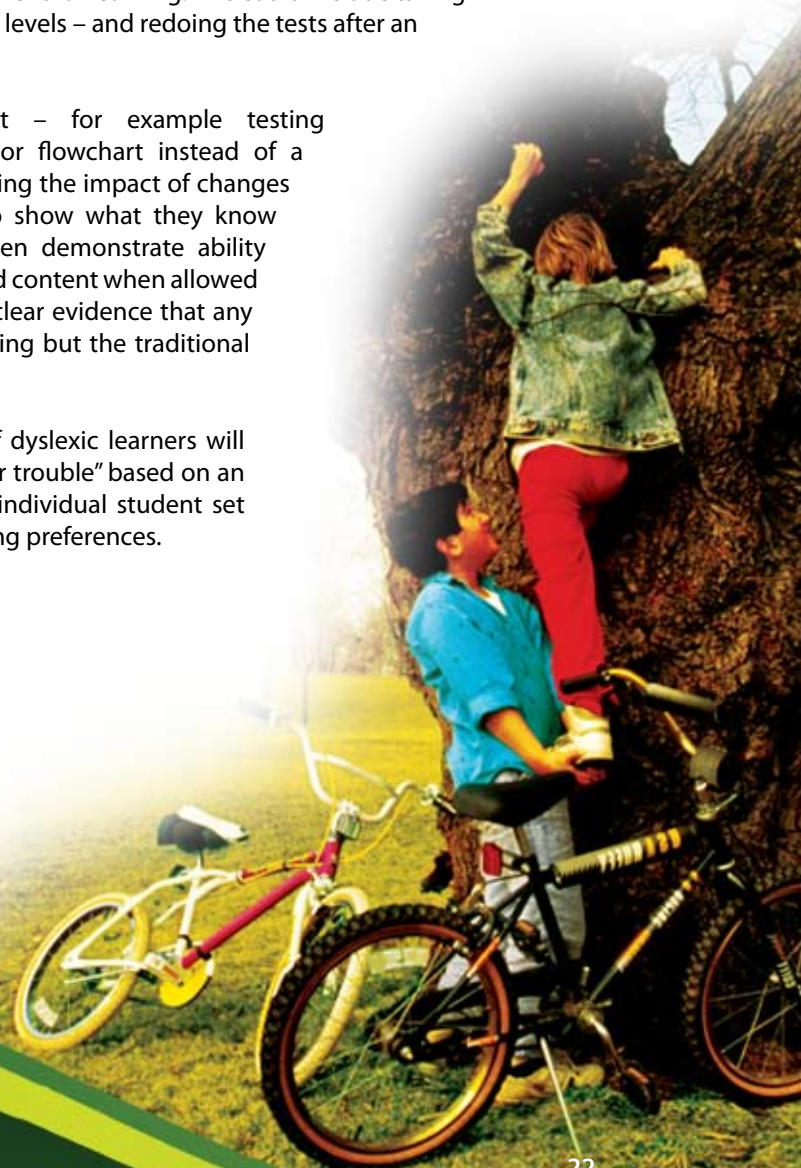
As soon as a school registers its intention to take the three steps, it will receive a 4D logo to load onto its website, along with a standard brief overview of the programme to use as a holding page while it develops its policy statement, classroom strategy and interventions. As these are developed, the school can update its website page accordingly so that information on progress may be shared. 4D schools will be listed on the [www.4DSchools.org.nz](http://www.4DSchools.org.nz) website. Schools which have significant success in implementing 4D may also be invited to become case studies, to show New Zealanders the action that is being taken to help Kiwi kids that think differently.

Once dyslexia-aware classroom practice becomes part of everyday learning and teaching it is important to be sure that it is having an impact. In terms of measuring progress, the quickest impact is likely to be seen in the quality/quantity of work produced – the evidence of achievement. So gathering “before and after” work samples is an excellent piece of informal assessment for learning. This could include taking some hard data, for example on reading and spelling levels – and redoing the tests after an allotted timeframe.

Requiring alternative evidence of achievement – for example testing understanding/recall via a mindmap, storyboard or flowchart instead of a formal paragraph is often a powerful way of measuring the impact of changes in approach. Dyslexic pupils who may struggle to show what they know through traditional sentences and paragraphs often demonstrate ability appropriate understanding and recall of concepts and content when allowed to present in preferred ways. When this occurs it is clear evidence that any apparent problems are not with learning and teaching but the traditional assessment process.

In some ways, effective monitoring and tracking of dyslexic learners will depend on the willingness of your school to “look for trouble” based on an awareness of what is “expected progress” for each individual student set against a profile of strengths, weaknesses and learning preferences.

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The concept of expected progress is based upon a range of measures, including comparing performance across a range of subjects and skills to identify “unexpected difficulties in relation to ability” in some areas compared with ability appropriate performance in other subject. If a student is 12 months behind with reading/spelling, making a “month’s gain in a month” does not impact on the learning gap so the challenge is to intervene to better close the gap and demonstrate real progress. It is also important to identify ability appropriate achievement in other subjects which may not be so heavily dependent upon literacy skills.

Other ways to measure progress may include:

- Asking the student to rank themselves in each subject areas and also get information from them on their performance, how they feel about school, are they progressing etc
- Talking to parents/caregivers and getting their perspective on progress
- Appointing a teacher aide to prepare templates for gathering anecdotal data on progress, and to gather the data
- Attitudinal changes are also valid, including better punctuality and less absenteeism

As noted in the introduction to this Guide, the 4D programme is designed to be collaborative and over time it is expected that resources will grow as information and best practice is shared. Collaboration is the absolute key, and the 4D website – [www.4Dschoools.org.nz](http://www.4Dschoools.org.nz) – is designed to include a easy-to-use forum for information sharing. International dyslexia consultant Neil MacKay will also be available to answer questions through this forum on a regular basis. A renowned expert in dealing with dyslexia in schools, Mr MacKay will also be joining us in New Zealand for Dyslexia Action Week next June, presenting a series of exclusive half-day workshops throughout the country. A cornerstone activity for Dyslexia Action Week, these not-to-be-missed workshops will draw on material from Mr MacKay’s acclaimed book “Removing Dyslexia as a Barrier to Achievement”, and look at how dyslexia best practice can be linked to the New Zealand National Curriculum. For more details and to book your place for one of these workshops (with a special discounted rate for 4D schools staff), visit [www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz](http://www.dyslexiafoundation.org.nz)

Future plans for the 4D programme in New Zealand will include the introduction of further web-based collaborative tools; perhaps a discussion forum or Wiki that will build knowledge from classroom experience.

In terms of a more formal measurement system, longer term plans for the 4D programme in New Zealand will include the introduction of an audited accreditation system which schools can sign up to as a way of demonstrating their commitment to action and progress on dyslexia.

One possible system of accreditation might include a graded level of progress for schools – perhaps a green, bronze, silver and gold medal status system showing the progress any given school has made on tackling dyslexia. This will provide schools with a pathway for reflection, development, and change within their school culture.

The planned DFNZ research trip to the UK in May 2009 by three New Zealand educators may well provide an opportunity to gather information about best practice for such a system – information which can then be used as the foundation for a locally-appropriate model.

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