



Specific Learning Differences Policy

Specific Learning Differences Representative: Marianne Arake

Tti School of English has a responsibility to create a warm and welcoming environment where students can study English and is committed to supporting students with suspected or identified Specific Learning Differences (SpLDs).

'Specific learning differences' (SpLDs) are a group of conditions that seem to be caused by variations in the way the brain develops, leading to some individuals to show different intellectual and emotional profiles, strengths and weaknesses, learning styles, and ways of perceiving the world. Within this context, SpLDs can be identified as distinctive patterns of difficulties, relating to the processing of information, within a continuum from very mild to severe, which may result in restrictions in literacy, language, number, motor function and organisational skills.

The most common SpLDs are dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, AD(H)D and Asperger's Syndrome, although the term can also be extended to include other conditions such as Tourette's Syndrome, and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

An SpLD is not a difficulty in itself, although people who have SpLDs often do experience difficulties in terms of functioning within the constraints of our society. A person who is identified as having one SpLD often has traits of others, to greater or lesser degrees. However, the exact degree of co-occurrence in any individual is hard to measure precisely because of the overlap of common characteristics.'

Anne-Margaret Smith, ELT Well

Many of the traits and behaviours of SpLDs, such as poor spelling, difficulty in processing information quickly and difficulty with listening, are also commonly exhibited by students learning a second or other language, therefore it is extremely difficult to 'diagnose' an SpLD. Having a label of an SpLD is of little help to the learner, particularly if he/she is not a long term student, so the school is not concerned with SpLD testing and instead focuses on providing teachers with guidance and practical support for the student.

Raising awareness and teacher training

Equipping teachers with the knowledge to recognise and understand SpLDs means that they are able to flag any students of concern. Tti School of English provided a SpLD awareness session for teachers with Anne Margaret Smith (in 2015), an expert in supporting language students with SpLDs in schools. The session, entitled '**Identifying and working with dyslexic learners**', covered the following points:

- ! What dyslexia and other SpLDs are
- ! Co-occurrence of SpLDs
- ! How to identify SpLDs
- ! Challenges for learners with SpLDs
- ! Including learners with SpLDs
- ! Classroom strategies and activities

For the teachers who were not present, the information will be cascaded through an INSETT session and the slides are available on the shared S: drive.

Procedure

If an SpLD has been flagged by the agent, the teacher of that student is made aware of this and organises to meet with the SpLD representative to find out more about the specific difficulties that the student may experience in class.

If a member of staff suspects that a student has an SpLD and believes that it is hindering his/her progress, they can contact the SpLD representative for support.

In both these cases, the SpLD representative will:

- ! Provide information about the specific condition (if known) to help the teacher understand the nature of the SpLD.
- ! Talk to the teacher about the behaviours that the student may exhibit.
- ! Prepare the teacher to speak to the student to find out what he/she feels makes it easier for him/her to learn
- ! Discuss how to give extra support to the student in class, such as strategies for helping him/her to overcome difficulties with listening to instructions.

- ! Suggest activities that will be beneficial to the whole class as well as the student in question, such as memory training and finding relationships between ideas.
- ! Follow up on the meeting a week later to see how the student is coping with the class and if the strategies are working.
- ! Conduct further research into the SpLD and suggest more strategies and ideas, if needed.

General support in the school

- ! Information for students, such as the timetable, social programme and library times, is given both verbally and visually on a large screen in the student induction and also includes a who's-who at Tti for students' assistance.
- ! There are posters around the school, which display the information clearly, using different colours.
- ! The administration team in reception and the academic team are available to help with any additional queries the student may have about his/her course, accommodation and life in London.
- ! A school social programme with many free activities each week is available to all students, which promotes social interaction and building social skills.

Good practice for lessons

Tti School of English teachers employ an interactive, multi-sensory approach to teaching. Although most of the features below are included in lessons, they can be particularly beneficial to students with an SpLD and should therefore be maximised in class whenever possible and relevant.

- ! Brain based teaching methods e.g. mind maps
- ! Tasks broken down into smaller chunks
- ! Lots of recapping and memory recall using different techniques to improve short term and working memory
- ! Information, such as new vocabulary, recorded on the board using different colours
- ! Use of visual media, e.g. pictures, photographs and videos
- ! Links between words, ideas and vocabulary groups and patterns are highlighted
- ! Use of Cuisenaire rods and realia

- ! Coloured backgrounds on boards (avoiding black on white)
- ! Use of the phonemic chart to match sounds and symbols
- ! Brain-Gym based learning breaks
- ! Study skills and memory techniques
- ! Clear instructions, given both verbally and visually
- ! Support from the teacher to record new vocabulary and making notes
- ! Use of technology, such as mobile phone and iPads, to record homework
- ! Positive reinforcement and encouragement to build confidence
- ! Encouragement of independent research and study

Cultural sensitivity

It is not the School's responsibility to 'diagnose' or label a student as having an SpLD, and as previously mentioned, it would be extremely difficult to do so. It is important to be culturally aware when talking to a student about any problems that they are having. In some cultures, SpLDs are not recognised and the student may react strongly to the suggestion that he/she has difficulties with learning. Staff should avoid using any terms connected to SpLDs, such as dyslexia or 'learning difficulties' and focus more on positive suggestions for improving specific skills, e.g. short-term memory. Staff can speak to the SpLD representative for further advice.

Resources and further information

ELT Well: <http://www.eltwell.co.uk/specific-learning-differences-splds.html>

SEN teacher: <http://www.senteacher.org/>

SEN magazine: <https://www.senmagazine.co.uk/resources/main/static/resources>

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