

nasen top ten things to know and do: dyslexia

Information sheet 5

Dyslexia — Top ten things to know and do

1. Definition

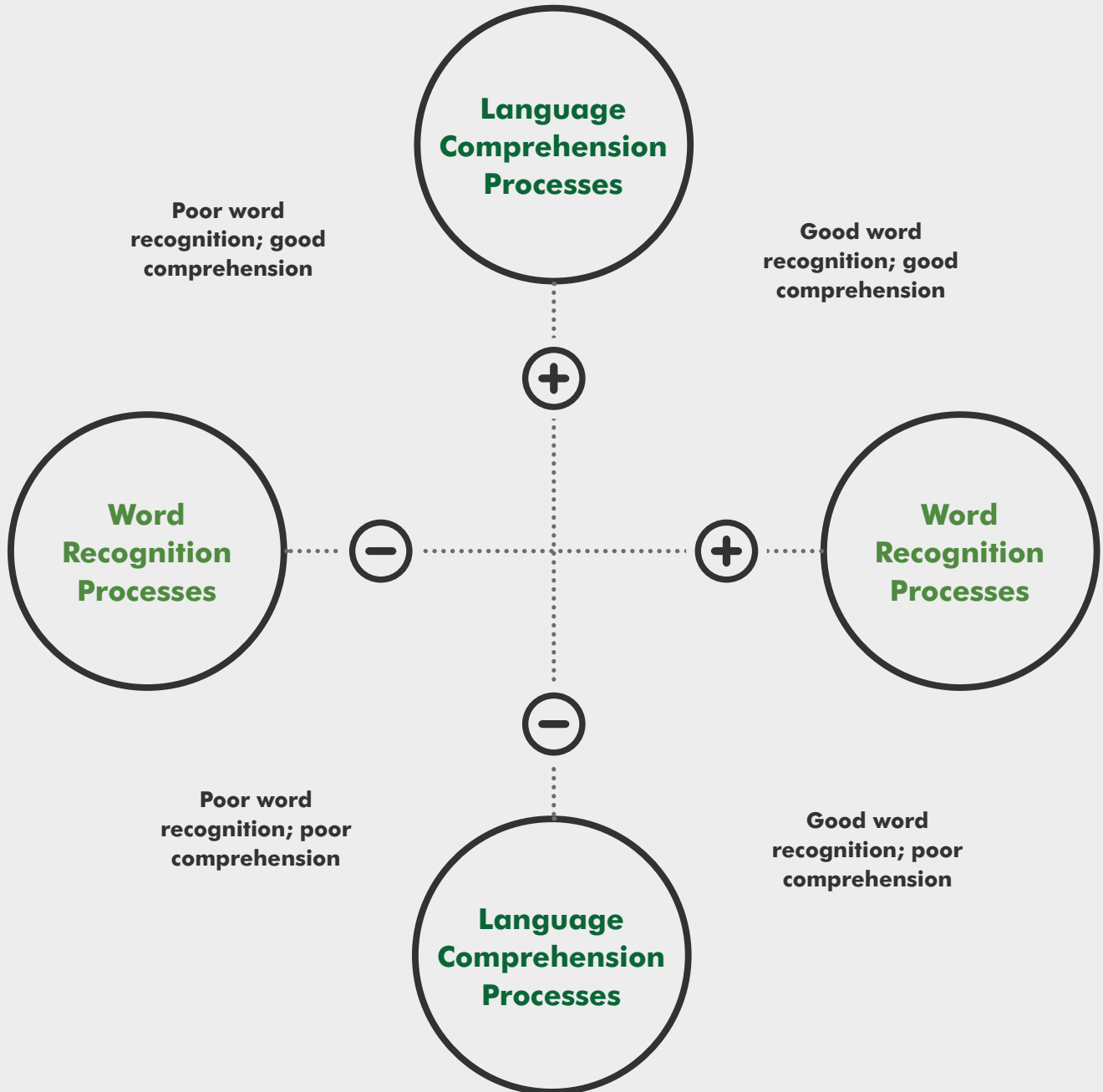
The most authoritative statement to date of a definition of dyslexia, the evidence of what interventions are successful and recommendations for action in relation to dyslexia, are contained in the report from Sir Jim Rose commissioned by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families from Sir Jim Rose, "Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties" (2009). Its main recommendations are now embedded in government policy. The definition is:

- ✓ Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.
- ✓ Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed.
- ✓ Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities.
- ✓ It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points.
- ✓ Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor coordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not by themselves markers of dyslexia.
- ✓ A good indication of the severity and persistence of dyslexic difficulties can be gained by examining how the individual responds or has responded to well-founded intervention.

2. Simple view of reading

The research in the report recognised that teachers who have a good understanding of dyslexia and offer skilled teaching adapted to the needs of the child greatly improve learning and outcomes for children with literacy and dyslexic difficulties. The starting point for every teacher for their pupils should be the Simple View of Reading (see page 44 of the Rose Review, 2009) because it enables the identification of children vulnerable to making progress because of:

- ✓ poor phonological awareness
- ✓ weak verbal memory
- ✓ lower verbal processing speed
- ✓ poor reading comprehension.



3. Identification

This should begin in the Early Years and the new Phonics test at KS1 is part of this process. Early identification helps to ensure that intervention at Wave 1 is offered as soon as possible. Successful outcomes are more likely if support is offered early. Behaviour difficulties and complications arising from loss of self-esteem are more likely to be avoided if support is early and appropriate. It is important for AfL (Assessment for Learning) to keep the literacy progress of all children under constant review as the continuum nature of dyslexia means that a child's difficulties may not become evident until later on in their schooling.

4. Children with more persistent difficulties

Children who are falling seriously behind with reading progress should be referred for more detailed assessment and may consequently need to receive more intensive and/or specialist interventions. Clear and effective procedures for referral need to be in place in the school. The information arising from any additional assessment and resulting teaching interventions should be clearly communicated to teachers, teaching assistants, parents and pupils and any other specialists working with the child. Some children may have more severe or co-occurring difficulties and need further assessment.

Updating of school procedures and changes to local authority protocols may be needed in the light of the Education Act 2011. Local authority protocols must be kept informed of any changes which may imply changes in provision for pupils.

5. Synthetic phonics and multisensory teaching

There is a requirement following the Education Act 2011 for all teachers in the primary sector to teach reading through the method of synthetic phonics. Consequently, there is a need to ensure that relevant support and CPD is available for all staff and that there are relevant materials in school to do this. Dyslexic pupils will need this to be complemented by a structured multisensory programme of literacy development.

6. Pupils as independent learners working effectively with Teaching Assistants

Pupils of all abilities should be encouraged to become independent learners. This means that a structured programme must be in place for each pupil and teaching assistants must work in collaboration and under the supervision of class teachers.

7. Teachers should be aware that pupils with poor literacy and dyslexia may also struggle with maths

The impact of poor short-term memory, sequencing difficulties and working with the language of maths (eg bigger, smaller, proportions, etc) impacts on the ability of pupils to progress in maths. A structured, cumulative programme of support will help these pupils develop their maths skills. Pupils' progress in maths should be kept under review as well as that in literacy. Some pupils may have dyscalculia and need specialist help to overcome this.

8. Co-occurring difficulties

Teachers will be aware that dyslexia may be associated with other co-occurring difficulties. These can include physical difficulties such as poor hearing, glue ear and visual stress and SpLDs such as Autism, SLI, ADHD and Dyspraxia. Procedures for referral and specialist support should be available to the school. See M. Snowling and C. Blackwell Hulme (2009) Developmental Disorders of Language and Cognition, Sussex, Wiley, Blackwell.

9. Metacognition

Dyslexic children and those with SpLDs learn in ways that are frequently idiosyncratic and different from those used by other children. Where these strategies are helpful and support memory for tables, spelling, etc they should be encouraged. It is good practice to both observe and ask children how they are learning/undertaking a task as this provides the teacher with good information about the child's approaches and needs and will enable the teacher to suggest good learning strategies in the future that meet the needs of the child.

10. Small changes – big benefits

Many changes are small, simple and easy to make in the classroom but have huge benefits for dyslexic children. Examples are the creation of a visual timetable, distributing a written lesson outline, homework written on a sheet rather than copied from the board. Using easily available technology must also be considered – eg dyslexic pupils use a voice recorder or a laptop.