

## A Learning Difference

Dyslexia is a learning difference, a combination of strengths and weaknesses which affects the learning process in reading, spelling, writing and sometimes number and calculation. Dyslexic learners may also have accompanying weaknesses in short-term memory, sequencing and the speed at which they process information. These are skills that everyone needs if they are to learn effectively in a busy classroom. They are also key skills for life.

Learning problems arise if dyslexia is not recognised and the teaching is inappropriate. To best understand how to meet the needs of dyslexic learners in mainstream, an appreciation of the subtle changes required in policy and practice is needed. If it is the policy to view dyslexia as a learning deficit, essentially because there is something 'wrong' with the child, then practice will tend to focus on special educational needs, remediation and teaching. However, if it is the policy to view dyslexia as a learning difference, one which conveys a range of strengths and weaknesses in common with all learning styles and preferences, then practice is able to focus on inclusion, differentiation and learning. Viewing dyslexia as a learning difficulty implies that something is 'wrong' with the learner. This leads to a focus on identifying weaknesses rather than celebrating strengths. This, in turn, can result in an emphasis on remediation by specialists rather than resolution by knowledgeable class and subject teachers. One inevitable consequence has been to focus on a school's special needs provision. However, this places responsibility for remediation on the SENCO and diverts attention away from the mainstream classroom which is, after all, the place where dyslexic students spend most of their time.

### **Specific learning difference**

Acknowledging a 'specific learning difficulty' as a 'specific learning difference' places the focus firmly on how all lessons are planned, resourced and taught and also on the way teachers are supported through school policy, practice and ethos. This offers real opportunities for an emphasis on inclusive mainstream strategies which are designed to empower all learners to be the best they can be. In dyslexia-friendly schools the focus has changed from establishing what is wrong with children in order to make them 'better', to identifying what is right in the classroom in order to enhance the effectiveness of learning.