Moderate learning difficulties

The area of 'cognition and learning' includes moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and developmental coordination disorder (dyspraxia).

Pupils with MLD will have attainments well below expected levels in all or most areas of the curriculum, despite appropriate interventions. They will have much greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and in understanding concepts. They may also have associated speech and language delay, low self-esteem, low levels of concentration and underdeveloped social skills. See:
www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/datatypes/Cognitionlearningneeds

The school environment/curriculum can present a range of barriers to participation and learning for pupils with MLD. The SEN Code of Practice says that pupils who demonstrate features of MLD, SLD, PMLD or specific learning difficulties require specific programmes to aid progress in cognition and learning.

In particular, pupils with MLD may need support with:

- understanding instructions and the requirements of tasks

- acquiring sequencing skills – for example, when following a recipe or science experiment

- understanding how they affect and relate to their immediate surroundings

- personal organisation over the short, medium and long term, and

- visual and auditory memory for information, processes and instructions.

Careful assessment of baselines and monitoring of progress will help ensure that their progress can be recognised and built upon.

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Issues, strategies and implications: 1

Strategies		
Learning issue	**Possible links**	**Approaches**
Maintaining an inclusive learning environment		Use drama and role-play
		Give pupils time to consider questions
		Plan self-checks at each stage of a task – eg a self-tick flow chart on laptop
Multi-sensory approaches, including ICT		Use visual timetables, prompt cards with pictures to remind pupils what to do
		Target praise
		Use browsers that simplify website presentation (eg cut down the number of pictures)
Working with additional adults		Word banks
		Writing frames
		Put up writing/symbol/picture posters showing ways to behave/tackle a learning task
Managing peer relationships effectively		Enlarge print
		Work with teaching assistant to check pupils' understanding of questions and tasks
		Structured questioning with teacher support/scaffolding of response
Adult-pupil communication		Make a mind map or other visual representation of what pupils already know
		Make an audio recording to record steps in the task
		Use presentation or simulation software to help pupils work through a sequence of behaviour they find hard – eg working in a group
Formative assessment/ assessment for learning		Minimise writing to concentrate on physical activity
		Use buddying to support the pupil
		Store resources where all pupils have access to them
Motivation		Teaching assistant goes over key vocabulary and ideas with the pupil before the lesson
		Display key words on the wall, with pictures/symbols
Memory/ consolidation		Physically demonstrate tasks
		Repeat information in different ways
		Use 'concrete', visual or audio materials to support pupils' understanding

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Issues, strategies and implications: 2

Strategies		
Learning issue	**Possible links**	**Approaches**
Maintaining an inclusive learning environment		Use drama and role-play
		Give pupils time to consider questions
		Plan self-checks at each stage of a task – eg a self-tick flow chart on laptop
		Use visual timetables, prompt cards with pictures to remind pupils what to do
		Target praise
Multi-sensory approaches, including ICT		Use browsers that simplify website presentation (eg cut down the number of pictures)
		Word banks
		Writing frames
		Put up writing/symbol/picture posters showing ways to behave/tackle a learning task
		Enlarge print
Working with additional adults		Work with teaching assistant to check pupils' understanding of questions and tasks
		Structured questioning with teacher support/scaffolding of response
		Make a mind map or other visual representation of what pupils already know
Managing peer relationships effectively		Make an audio recording to record steps in the task
		Use presentation or simulation software to help pupils work through a sequence of behaviour they find hard – eg working in a group
Adult-pupil communication		Minimise writing to concentrate on physical activity
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Formative assessment/ assessment for learning		Store resources where all pupils have access to them
		Teaching assistant goes over key vocabulary and ideas with the pupil before the lesson
Motivation		Display key words on the wall, with pictures/symbols
		Physically demonstrate tasks
Memory/ consolidation		Repeat information in different ways
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Two pupils

A primary pupil

Lewis

Lewis is in year 3 of his mainstream primary school.

He greatly enjoys sequencing exercises and games that involve making patterns. His coordination is relatively good and he enjoys football and likes his Arsenal shirt very much. He has an excellent relationship with his teaching assistant, Maxine.

His reading age is three years below his chronological age. He finds spoken instructions difficult and does not enjoy speaking in a large group.

A secondary student

Anita

Anita is in year 8 of her mainstream secondary school.

She has excellent relationships with her teaching assistant, Maxine, and her regular buddy, Zoe. She will chat readily to the small group of friends and adults she knows. She greatly enjoys an Australian soap opera on TV.

Her reading age is three years below her chronological age. Her writing is slow, even on a laptop, and her coordination is not very good. She has a poor memory for adult instructions and has problems with personal organisation.

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Handout 5

Lesson plans

Brief details of a primary lesson plan: literacy	
Area	• The group is working on glossaries and how to look up words in dictionaries
Whole group	• Presentation of learning outcomes • Whole-class demonstration: alphabetical order – pupils at the front of the class move into alphabetical order following suggestions from those in the rest of the class • Whole-class exercise led by teacher and teaching assistant (modelling): defining a word • Introduction to tasks
Small group	• Class works in small groups to define a word, record their definition and then check it in the dictionary
Plenary	• Whole-class discussion of results • Evaluation against learning outcomes

Brief details of a secondary lesson plan: English	
Area	• The group is learning to analyse the presentation of information on posters, websites etc
Whole group	• Presentation of learning outcomes • Whole-class discussion: points to look for in a poster or website page • Introduction to task
Small group	• Small group work: analysis of the messages on a poster • Groups move to tell other groups of their conclusions
Plenary	• Whole-class discussion of conclusions • Evaluation against learning outcomes

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Planning for a specific pupil with MLD: response form

Record your suggestions for support for a chosen pupil in the lesson for which you have the plan.

	Suggested support	Time implemented • before the lesson • during lesson • after the lesson
Learning outcomes		
Pupil grouping		
Teaching assistant support		
'Buddying'		
Teaching styles and approaches		
Access strategies/ reasonable adjustments		

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Effective approaches for pupils with learning difficulties

Learning outcomes

- Pupils with generalised learning difficulties need learning outcomes that are closely matched to the stage they have reached, and which build on what they already know, understand and can do.

- Outcomes should offer just enough challenge to move pupils on, but not so much as to render tasks unachievable.

- When pupils are struggling with new learning, it can be useful to break the task down into small steps. This will help identify any gaps in essential prior learning and pinpoint the next step towards mastery.

- The statutory inclusion statement in the National Curriculum makes clear that it is good practice to:

  - 'track back' to earlier sections of the programmes of study/strategy document to find material/outcomes at an appropriate level for a pupil with learning difficulties

  - leave out parts of sections from the programmes of study/strategy and concentrate on those parts that are particularly important or relevant for the pupil.

Teachers that successfully include pupils with learning difficulties typically modify the curriculum in this way, while retaining the pupil's involvement in the areas the rest of the class is working on.

Effective teaching approaches include:

- encouragement

- peer support

- multi-sensory teaching styles

- providing lots of examples to help the pupil learn concepts

- linking learning to the pupil's everyday experience – using real-life examples

- scaffolding – putting in support (like doing part of the task for the pupil or doing it with them) that is slowly withdrawn

- repetition, reinforcement and opportunities to practise.

We know from our own experience how much we need encouragement and support when learning is difficult. Often it feels more comfortable if a peer provides that support. Finding ways in which pupils can help each other, when appropriate, releases the teacher to work with other pupils.

When working with the whole class, active and interactive teaching that gives pupils opportunities to handle objects, see pictures and use movement will engage pupils with learning difficulties more than unbroken teacher talk. It is important to provide multiple examples of new concepts and, where possible, to take these examples from pupils' own real-life experience rather than talking in abstract terms.

Pupils will often benefit from 'scaffolding' – having a peer or adult work alongside them at first, who gradually withdraws as the pupil's confidence grows – or finishing a task that has already been partly done for them. Once they have learnt something new, they will need many opportunities to practise. Problems often arise for pupils with MLD when the teacher moves on too quickly, before they have had a chance to consolidate what they know.

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Access strategies include:

- clear instructions
- pre-tutoring
- use of real objects
- explicitly teaching the vocabulary the pupil will need
- alternatives to written recording
- use of pre-prepared frameworks to support recording.

Adults' language can often be a barrier to learning. Pupils with MLD need short, clear instructions, repeated if necessary. They can often benefit from 'pre-tutoring' – preparation for a task so that they come to it already knowing the key vocabulary and concepts. Using a teaching assistant to pre-tutor a group of pupils can be more useful than having the assistant support them with the work the class have been set. It promotes independence and may enable the pupils to take a fuller part in the lesson. Similarly, putting up lists of key vocabulary for a particular topic or lesson and teaching the meaning of each word will give pupils a head start with their subject learning.

Finally, it is important to remember how difficult it is for some pupils to extract the salient points from information they are given, and to record their ideas using conventional written recording. Inclusive teachers use a range of alternatives to writing and make regular use of support systems such as writing frames and other visual approaches.

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Reflection questions

Consider these questions in relation to your focus pupil with your mentor or a colleague.

How can you extend the range of strategies you currently use to support your pupil?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What are the implications of using these additional strategies for resources, teachers and teaching assistants?

_____

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_____

How might you choose appropriate learning objectives for this pupil if those set out in the scheme of work you are using are not suitable?

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_____

_____

How might you evaluate the effectiveness of these new strategies?

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Points for action

What do I want to do next to develop my practice?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How will I do this?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What is my timescale for this to happen?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How will I know if I have been successful?

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_____

_____

_____

Do I need to involve anyone else in enabling this to happen?

_____

_____

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_____

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Self-study tasks

Every Child Matters

- **Inclusion and Every Child Matters (SST 1)**

- **SEN and disability legislation (SST 2)**

- **English as an additional language and SEN (SST 3)**

- **Children's needs and development (SST 4)**

- **ICT and SEN (SST 5)**

Cognition and learning

- **Moderate learning difficulties (SST 6)**

- **Dyslexia and specific learning difficulties (SST 7)**

- **Working memory (SST 8)**

Behavioural, emotional and social needs

- **Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (SST 9)**

Communication and interaction

- **Speech, language and communication needs (SST 10)**

- **Autistic spectrum disorders (SST 11)**

Physical and sensory impairment

- **Visual impairment (SST 12)**

- **Hearing impairment (SST 13)**

- **Handwriting (SST 14)**

- **Developmental coordination disorder/dyspraxia (SST 15)**

Working in partnership

- **Working with colleagues in school (SST 16)**

- **Working with parents/carers and other professionals (SST 17)**

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