Responding to pupil’s needs when teaching English

**The importance of English to pupils with learning difficulties**

Learning English encompasses all aspects of communication – non-verbal and written**.** Work in English promotes learning across the curriculum and underpins pupils’ achievements and participation in all aspects of their lives.

In particular, English offers pupils with learning difficulties opportunities to:

* Develop the ability to respond, to listen and to understand
* Interact and communicate effectively with others in a range of social situations
* Make choices, obtain information, question and be actively involved in decision making
* Develop creativity and imagination
* Have access to a wide range of literature to enrich and broaden their experience

In response to these opportunities, pupils can make progress in English by:

* Using a wide variety of activities, which are age-related, especially where aspects of the programmes of study are revisited at later key stages
* Increasing engagement I, and the quality of, range of literature and communication activities
* A widening of horizons and participation from the immediate social circles of family and school, to an extended participation in the local and wider community
* Adapting to different circumstances and contexts with independence and confidence
* Acquiring an increasing range of vocabulary, from the names of everyday objects, events and people, to vocabulary used across the curriculum and related to the wider community

***Speaking and Listening***

In the broadest interpretation, speaking and listening encompasses all forms of communicative responses and intent. Communication may include one or more of the following:

* The use of body movements, *for example, whole body movements (such as turning towards or away), eye gaze, facial expressions (such as smiling or grimacing), and pointing using eye, head, foot, fists or fingers*
* Gestures, *for example, clapping, waving and reaching,* and formalised signs
* Communication aids, *for example, objects of reference, photographs, pictures, symbols and electronic communication*
* Vocalisation and speech

Staff working with pupils at different key stages may find it helpful to refer to the QCA publication *Teaching speaking and listening at key stages 1 and 2* for suggestions about ways to develop skills in all aspects of this programme of study. In addition, the NLS key stage 3 framework for year 7 contains ideas about teaching drama and work in role, all of which may be freely adapted for a range of pupils.

***Speaking***

To encourage pupils to express their dislikes, dislikes, feelings, emotions and preferences for different audiences, it is important to develop vocalisation, whether spontaneous or imitative, and/or the use of a range of communicative movements and gestures. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* Participate in social routines and to communicate in a widening range of situation
* Develop oral motor skills to support the development of speech, *for example, blowing, sucking, licking and humming*
* Produce sequences of intonated sounds and words
* Use a widening range of vocabulary
* Use an appropriate form of communication for a range of purposes, *for example, to request, instruct, question, share information, organise actions and thoughts*
* Vary the tone and volume of their voices in different situations and then monitor their use of volume, tone and pitch
* Use appropriate facial expressions

***Listening and responding***

It is important to develop the ability to attend, listen and discriminate between contrasting stimuli, *for example auditory, visual, tactile and olfactory.* Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* listen and develop auditory memory, *for example, responding to sounds in the environment or to the cessation of sound, attending to adult imitation of their own sounds, responding to their own name, imitation and turn-taking activities, responding appropriately to specific sounds, words and phrases and exploring language in different contexts*
* maintain and develop concentration, *for example, focusing on an activity, tracking a sound or movement, copying sequences of sounds , listening and attending to rhymes, stories and simple recounts linked to sensory cues, sustaining attention in different activities, and responding to instructions.*

***Group discussions and interaction***

It is important to develop the ability to respond to the communication of others and to develop joint attention in both one-to-one and group situations. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* take turns in a range of situations and for a variety of purposes, *for example, cooperating with others in a shared task, actively contributing to interactions, and maintaining interaction through more than one turn*
* initiate communication*, for example, through smiling, making eye contact, reaching out, touching, or drawing attention to an object or event of interest*

***Drama***

Drama provides a rich and motivating stimulus to develop a wide range of speaking and listening skills in novel, exciting and real- life situations, including involvement in the community. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to develop:

* a sense of self and of their role in different social groups
* anticipation and recall
* listening, concentration and attention skills
* the ability to choose, justify and discriminate between decisions
* the confidence to experiment and try new ideas where there is no right or wrong answer
* cooperation, tolerance and willingness to work with others
* self-discipline and self-confidence and involvement in the community

***Reading***

For pupils with learning difficulties, reading may be interpreted as any activity that leads to the derivation of meanings from visual or tactile representations, *for example, objects, pictures, symbols or written words. They* may be accessed visually, aurally or through touch, *for example, looking at objects pictures, symbols or words, feeling objects of reference, looking and listening to CD-ROMs or computer programmes, listening to an adult reading aloud or an audio tape.*

***Reading Strategies***

Pupils may be taught a range of strategies to enjoy, to access and to understand, different types of symbolic representations, *for example, objects of reference, pictures, symbols and text or combinations of these.*

***Phonemic awareness and phonic knowledge***

It is important to develop every pupil’s ability to listen and to attend. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* locate, track and sequence sounds
* sustain attention in a listening activity
* recognise that sounds and words can relate to people, situations, actions and objects
* discriminate between different sounds, words and phrases
* blend sounds for reading and segment them for spelling
* develop a knowledge of grapheme and phoneme correspondences.

***Word recognition and symbolic knowledge***

It is important to develop the ability to attend to objects, patterns , pictures, symbols and words. Pupils can be encouraged to link these to people, situations, objects, and action and to learn how they can provide cues to an activity and to make choices. Teaching this across key stages may help pupils to:

* discriminate between different representations
* distinguish between text and illustrations
* match and identify a range of familiar representations, *for example, signs, symbols and words of personal importance, high-frequency words, content words or phrases from familiar books or reading schemes, social and environmental vocabulary, cross-curricular and subject –specific vocabulary*

***Grammatical awareness***

Grammatical awareness will develop from, and support, pupils ability to use and understand how the different elements of speech, for example, how nouns, verbs, adjectives and prepositions are used and combined in different ways so that meaning is clear. Reading may provide a visual prompt to support pupils who have difficulties with syntax or who use telegrammatic speech in appropriate language structures. To develop pupils reading comprehension, it is important to develop their understanding of words, sentences and whole texts and the ways in which these are selected, combined and sequence. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* recognise patterns and continue a pattern of objects or symbols
* sequence objects, symbols and words from left to right, and understand that they need to be accessed in that way to make sense
* develop the concept of beginnings and ends, *for example, of a story, an information text, a sentence or a word*
* recognise when the order of an object, picture, symbol or word sequence has been changed and how such changes can alter meanings

***Contextual understanding***

The development of pupils’ knowledge of objects permanence will support the understanding of cues and signals linked to reading activities, and the ability to consider the text as a whole. Contextual understanding will be built upon knowledge, skills and understanding developed in speaking and listening activities, *for example, pupils appropriate responses to specific sounds*, *words and phrases, their use and understanding of developing vocabulary and their exploration of language used across different contexts.* Teaching thisaspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* Become familiar with, and anticipate, routines linked to reading activities and the content of different texts, *for example, through story sacks, handling objects linked to information texts, a mood created within the classroom before reading a particular type of story using lights, music, sound effects to prepare for a scary story or the opening of a book providing the cue that an adult is about to read aloud*
* *Make connections between different parts of a text,* *for example, how stories begin and end, the sequences of stories, the order of a recipe, what has been included and omitted in information writing*
* Predict what happens next in a story or what a book might be about
* Apply knowledge gained from experience of other texts

***Reading for information***

It is important to develop the ability to recognise and to obtain information from the objects, photographs, pictures, symbols and text. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* Access information from a wide variety of sources, *for example, objects of reference , pictures and photographs, reference books, tables, charts, maps, diagrams, dictionaries, CD-ROMs, audio tapes, internet sites.*
* Choose, select and handle books and print and use them correctly, *for example, cover, beginning, end, page, line, word, letter, title*
* Recognise and name different types of non-fiction and non-literary texts and understand their uses, *for example, newspapers, magazines, dictionaries, cookery books, atlases, diaries, telephone directories, leaflets, letters*
* Identify, understand, and use subject-specific and specialist vocabularies
* Use some of the organisational features of non-fiction texts to find information, *for example, headings, captions, illustrations, contents, index and chapters*
* Identify facts and opinions and compare information from different texts.

***Literature***

A response to, and an understanding of, literature will initially be accessed through attending to a familiar voice reading aloud and to objects, pictures and varied sensory stimuli linked to a story. It is important to develop pupils’ understanding of fiction, poetry and drama. Teaching his aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* Attend and respond to the sound, rhythm and mood of a variety of literary texts
* Respond in different ways to what they have read or heard, *for example, through movement mime, role play, art, music, shared writing activities*
* Develop a wide understanding and use of vocabulary linked to text, supported where appropriate by objects, pictures, symbols and multi-sensory resources
* Respond to, identify and describe characters, events, settings, and emotions in fiction texts
* Contribute to shared discussion, making reference to the characters and plot and indicating personal preferences
* Compare the work of the same and different writers, identifying similarities and differences ,  *for example, compare two poems by the same poet; compare two pieces of writing on the same theme, but in different styles or from different cultural traditions*
* Respond to, and be aware of, the different uses of language and subject matter from different traditions.

***Writing***

Writing may be interpreted as any activity that communicates and records events, experiences, information, thoughts and feelings. This may be in stories, scripts, poetry, personal writing or functional writing, *for example, lists, instructions.* Writing presents a considerable challenge for many pupils with learning difficulties. The most appropriate form of recording should be selected according to pupils’ needs, *for example, using objects, pictures, photographs, symbols and text; own name, picture, letter and word stamp; working with an adult as a scribe or a combination of these.* All relevant ICT and communication aids should be used to support and foster writing, includingcomposition through dictation*, for example, to a tape recorder, an adult scribe or voice-activated software,* and the use of computers in addition to handwriting. Technology can also be used for listening to what pupils have written themselves or what others have written.

***Composition***

It is important to provide pupils with the tools to develop the skills to record information in a variety of ways. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* Record events, experiences and information, *for example, making simple books that reflect personal interests*
* Link objects, pictures, words and symbols to convey meaning
* Select and choose appropriate vocabulary
* Use the experience of stories, poems and simple recounts as a basis for shared and independent writing, *for example, re-telling, substituting and extending*
* Write in different styles, *for example, captions, lists, letters, address labels, action plans for progress files, application forms for work experience*
* Vary the writing for different purposes and different readers.

***Planning and drafting***

Pupils with learning difficulties may work with staff and peers on planning and drafting activities. It is important to develop the ability to select and assemble objects, photographs, pictures, symbols and words appropriate to the activity. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:

* Trace, overwrite, copy and write familiar words And phrases that have been generated in response to a starting point
* Plan, note and develop initial ideas, *for example, using objects, pictures or photographs as a starting point for their work; writing frames, idea webs, lists, concept maps, network diagrams and sign-posting systems*
* Draft and develop ideas from a plan into a structured written text, *for example, through working with an adult as a scribe, copying dictated words and text, selecting symbols, words or sentences or a combination of them on a switch-operated computer program*
* Revise, change and improve drafts, *for example, through working individually with an adult or in a shared writing group and discussing and reviewing the written text, reading their own work aloud, underlying words that could be substituted by a more interesting vocabulary, cutting and pasting work on a word processor.*

***Spelling and punctuation***

Working on punctuation will be supported by activities that highlight the importance of making sense of what is read and the needs of the reader. It needs to be closely allied to the development of grammatical awareness. Work on spelling will be supported by activities that highlight the similarities and differences between sounds, words and letters. The latter will need to be closely allied to phonemic awareness and phonic knowledge. Knowledge, skills and understanding should be developed as outlined in the National Curriculum programmes of study and the teaching objectives in the National Literacy Strategy *Framework for Teaching.*

***Handwriting and presentation***

It is important to provide extensive opportunities to develop pupils’ awareness of, and attention to, their hands and fingers, and the ability to use them with increasing control, *for example, bringing two objects together, transferring objects from hand to hand, and picking up small objects using a pincer grasp. Pupils can experiment with different media, and should be encouraged to use a range of writing materials to make marks and develop pencil control and handwriting skills. For many pupils with learning difficulties, presentation skills will be best supported by ICT. Teaching this aspect across key stages may help pupils to:*

* Be aware of, attend to and manipulate switches, *for example, through adult prompts and guidance, using different body parts, such as head and foot*
* Develop hand/eye coordination, *for example through left to right tracking activities; a range of fine motor activities; exploring patterns, circular movements and letter shapes and outline; overwriting, copying and/or forming shapes and letters; colouring within a defined outline; developing and practicing handwriting, ensuring correct letter formation, orientation and proportion*
* Take pride in their work
* Recognise and understand how to set out their work, how to check that it is neat and clear, and how to revise it and amend mistakes