

Supporting children with cognition and learning difficulties in the classroom

Children with **cognition and learning difficulties**, which are also referred to as **learning disabilities**, require tailored support within the classroom to facilitate their learning and ensure an inclusive educational experience.

Here are some examples of how to support children with cognition and learning difficulties for classroom learning:

Implement Personalised and Adapted Instruction

- Utilise **highly personalised and evidence-based reasonable adjustments** specific to each child's unique needs and aspirations. Schools have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments and provide extra support, aids, and services to avoid disadvantaging children with disabilities. All staff should proactively identify what a child needs to participate and learn.
- Adopt **scaffolding teaching** methods, which involve structured support to help children access information and learning.
- **Adapt worksheets and re-write information** to make it more accessible.
- Use **adapted stories at four different ability levels, often incorporating WIDGIT symbols**, to cater to a wide range of abilities.
- Develop a **learning plan, or Individual Education Plan (IEP), that builds skills step-by-step** to improve success. This plan should also provide children with opportunities to practice new skills, receive encouragement, and get feedback.
- Be flexible in program delivery, allowing for **shorter sessions, repetition of sessions, or the completion of various activities attached to each session** before moving on to the next, especially for complex content.

- Ensure **lessons are interesting** and that there is an **equal allocation of teachers' support** to keep children engaged in their learning. This moves away from a "one size fits all approach".
- Employ **Person Centred Active Support, the National Autistic Society's SPELL Framework, Total or Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC)**, and **Positive Behaviour Support** as good practices for those with learning disabilities and/or autism. AAC, for example, can assist with communication which is often linked to learning.

Enhance Staff Training and Awareness

- **Support all education staff in their initial training and throughout their careers** to identify and address the underlying needs of SEND and understand their statutory responsibilities.
- Teachers need to be trained to better identify and adapt their teaching to the needs of children with various SEND, including those related to cognition and learning.
- Cultivate an understanding that a child's **challenging behaviour is often a communication about their state of mind**, which may indicate unmet needs, anxiety, or frustration, rather than deliberate defiance.

Foster an Inclusive and Supportive Environment

- Create a **whole-school environment that emphasises inclusion and cooperation**.
- Maintain **high aspirations for all children and young people** with SEND.
- Develop children's **understanding and valuing of difference** in others.
- Ensure children with SEND **feel accepted and belong** within the school community.
- Adopt a holistic view, seeing children and young people "as a whole" rather than solely focusing on their disability or illness.
- Address systemic racism and cultural insensitivity in educational practices and curricula, which can improve the learning environment for all students.
- Provide **extra support, such as pastoral care, school counselling, or referrals to community-based services**, when needed