



# LAGAN COLLEGE

## A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

**STUDENTS WITH  
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

# STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

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# WELCOME

Supporting students with special educational needs is an integral part of creating an inclusive and effective learning environment.

This booklet is designed to inform parents by answering common questions about Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Lagan College.

It explains how we work with children and families to ensure the right support is in place, and how we help all students reach their potential.

# AUTISM

## WHAT IS AUTISM?

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects communication, social interaction, and how a person experiences the world. It is a spectrum, meaning each autistic person is unique.

## What support is available in school?

We try to tailor support to each student.

Some strategies include:

- Visual timetables and structured routines
- Clear and precise communication
- Social stories to prepare for changes
- Permission for sensory accommodations (e.g. wearing ear defenders, movement breaks, uniform adjustments)
- Mentoring and regular check-ins
- Awareness that students may mask their difficulties in school and present very differently at home
- Awareness of hidden needs and listening to the student
- Mindful of self-esteem issues and attention needs
- Use of quieter spaces at break and lunch time



This is not an exhaustive list.

We work closely with families and external professionals when necessary.



## How are teachers informed?

Staff are kept informed through:

- Regular SEN updates
- Ongoing professional development and training from services like the Education Authority's Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (AAIS), Middletown Centre for Autism and Strive NI.
- Individual Education Plans (IEPS)/Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) for pupils at Stage 1/2/3 of the SEN Code of Practice

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Will an Autism diagnosis affect my child's learning and achievement?**

Not necessarily. Many students with Autism succeed and thrive academically.

The key is a supportive, predictable environment tailored to their needs.

### **Can a pupil get extra time in exams?**

A diagnosis of Autism does not automatically guarantee exam adjustments. At GCSE and A Level, Exam Access Arrangements (EAAs) must be based on:

- Evidence of substantial and long-term difficulties
- The student's normal way of working
- Application through the Access Arrangements Online (AAO) system
- JCQ regulations

## IN THE CLASSROOM TEACHERS WILL AIM TO...

- Get to know the class – their names, medical diagnoses, SEN and special interests
- Maintain consistent, predictable and structured routines – this creates a sense of safety for the young person as they know what to expect
- Consider how they can make the classroom ‘safer’ for autistic young people eg. how they ask questions and expect them to be answered, the tone of voice they use, how they deal with and manage behaviour of individuals and the group



### SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

- Consider seating beside supportive peers which can help with social and communication development
- Consider the sensory demands of seating within the classroom eg. seats beside the door may be noisier
- Ensure that they are able to circulate around all pupils to check on them

### TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Break tasks into manageable chunks
- Use clear and directive language
- Be flexible in their approach – use a variety of resources, explain in different ways, allow pupils to show their learning in different ways
- Give time to process instructions and complete tasks – and support this with visual reminders of how much time is left eg. digital timer
- Use written instructions or resources to support verbal instructions
- Help young people to manage choices – abstract ideas can be difficult to understand so it can be useful to narrow choices to ‘This,’ or ‘That.’
- Consider ways to reduce anxiety – often young people mask what they find difficult in school but experience high levels of anxiety eg. no cold-calling questions, give prior notification of changes to routine
- Recognise that because young people mask, they might not tell them that they are struggling. Consider how they check on them eg. ‘what are you finding challenging about this activity?’
- Praise and encourage pupils by giving specific feedback eg. ‘I like the way you used a simile in this sentence.’

*Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and use of strategies may be dependent on the nature of the subject and the range of need within classes.*



# 10 AUTISM FRIENDLY STRATEGIES TEACHERS USE IN THE CLASSROOM

**PREDICTABLE  
AND  
STRUCTURED  
ROUTINES**

**TIME GIVEN  
TO PROCESS  
INSTRUCTIONS**

**CALM TONE  
AND VOLUME  
WHEN SPEAKING**

**NOTICE AND  
KNOW EACH  
PUPIL**

**SEATING BESIDE  
SUPPORTIVE  
PEERS**

**WRITTEN  
REINFORCEMENT  
OF VERBAL  
INSTRUCTIONS**

**CONSIDER  
THE SENSORY  
CHALLENGES OF  
YOUR CLASSROOM**

**ALLOW LEARNING  
TO BE SHOWN IN  
DIFFERENT WAYS**

**USE OF CLEAR  
DIRECTIVE  
LANGUAGE**

**UNDERSTAND  
THAT PUPILS MASK  
THEIR DIFFICULTIES**



## DYSLEXIA

### WHAT IS DYSLEXIA?

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that primarily affects reading, writing, and spelling.

It is not related to intelligence and often involves difficulties with processing information, working memory, and phonological awareness.

### Can a pupil be tested for dyslexia?

Formal testing cannot be done in school, but we can provide observations and learning evidence that may indicate dyslexic traits.

If parents wish to explore diagnostic assessment, this is usually carried out by a qualified educational psychologist.

Usually parents opt to do this privately as EA Educational Psychology hours are limited and waiting lists in schools are exceptionally long.



Pictured above is the international symbol for dyslexia, the '**pqbd symbol**', formed by the letters p, q, b, and d. It was designed to empower the dyslexic community and celebrate their unique ways of processing information.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What support is available in school?**

Individual class teachers use a range of strategies within their lessons to ensure they are Dyslexia Friendly.

### **Some support may include:**

- Differentiated classroom instruction
- Use of assistive technology (e.g., text-to-speech software)
- Word banks and chunked learning
- Visual aids to support text
- Provision of resources on coloured paper
- Parents may also provide coloured overlays or reading rulers for use in school

In cases where dyslexia is so severe that it impedes a pupil's access to the curriculum and they require intervention over and above what is offered within the classroom, the pupil may receive supports at Stage 1 or 2 of the SEN Code of Practice. This is decided on the basis of evidence from classwork, teacher observations, analysis of school data and in consultation with the pupil and family.

### **Can my child get extra time in exams?**

A dyslexia diagnosis does not automatically guarantee exam adjustments. At GCSE and A Level, Exam Access Arrangements (EAAs) must:

- Be supported by school data and teacher observations
- Reflect the child's normal way of working
- Follow Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) guidelines
- Be applied for through the Access Arrangements Online system (AAO)

## IN THE CLASSROOM TEACHERS WILL AIM TO...

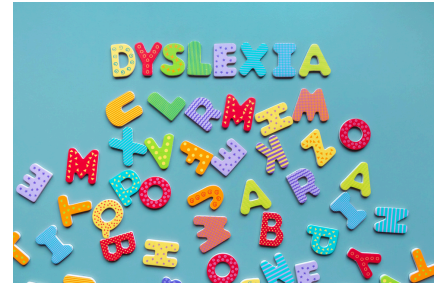


### SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

- Make sure they can see the pupil and non-verbally assess if they can access the work
- Ensure they can clearly see the board
- Consider seating pupil beside those who can positively motivate them
- Avoid seating a dyslexic pupil beside 'busy' noticeboards – this can cause distraction

### PRESENTATION OF WORK

- Use sans-serif fonts like Arial, Calibri and Verdana
- Use font size minimum 12 (as used in this document)
- Use larger line spacing between sentences
- Use bold for emphasis – avoid underlining or italics
- Use headings and sub-headings to structure work
- Use single-coloured backgrounds – avoid patterns or images in the background of text
- Use dark coloured writing on light coloured background – preferably not white. Pastel shades such as light blue are popular
- Avoid green and red/pink text, as these colours are difficult for those who have colour vision deficiencies (colour blindness)
- Use images to support text. Flow charts are ideal for explaining procedures. Pictograms and graphics can help to locate and support information in the text
- Consider using bullet points and numbering rather than continuous prose
- Give instructions clearly



### TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Break tasks into manageable chunks
- Use word banks and definitions
- Avoid giving long lists of spellings alone – consider pupil understanding of the terms or other adjustments that can be made for example, reduced number of spellings
- Use positive marking – avoid highlighting every spelling mistake, praise and reward progress, correct previously taught or key words
- Provide additional time where possible for pupils to complete work
- Encourage redrafting
- Teach proof-reading skills. For example, check spelling of key words with word banks
- Allow pupil to use a reading aid. Eg, a ruler to help maintain place on a page
- Allow pupil to use coloured overlays
- Consider alternatives to longer pieces of writing for example, oral presentations, diagrams and reports as a means of demonstrating understanding
- Consider how you give notes – pupils may struggle to write from the board
- Consider alternatives to writing homework on the board. Allow pupil to photograph instructions, post details on GC or provide a printed copy

*Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and use of strategies may be dependent on the nature of the subject and the range of need within classes.*



# 10 DYSLEXIA FRIENDLY STRATEGIES TEACHERS USE IN THE CLASSROOM

**PLAIN SINGLE  
COLOURED  
BACKGROUNDS**

**USE OF  
DYSLEXIC  
FRIENDLY FONTS**  
(EG; ARIAL, CALIBRI AND VERDANA)

**USE OF IMAGES  
TO SUPPORT  
TEXT**

**CHUNKING  
LESSON INTO  
SMALLER PARTS**

**NOT  
'COLD-CALLING'  
TO READ**

**GIVING  
'BRAIN  
BREAKS'**

**USE OF  
WORD  
BANKS**

**MARKING  
POSITIVELY**

**INCLUSIVE  
HOMEWORK**

EG; 'UNDERSTANDING VOCAB'  
RATHER THAN SPELLING LISTS

**USE OF  
AVAILABLE  
TECHNOLOGY**



## ADHD

### WHAT IS ADHD?

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects attention, impulse control, and activity levels. It can involve inattentiveness, hyperactivity, impulsivity, or a combination of both.

### How is ADHD identified in school?

School staff may observe persistent difficulties with focus, restlessness, or impulsive behaviour. Where concerns arise, we may recommend speaking to a GP for formal assessment. Alternatively, parents/families may wish to pursue a private diagnosis by a suitably qualified educational psychologist. Usually, parents opt to do this privately as HSC waiting lists in are exceptionally long.

### What support is available in school?

Individual class teachers use a range of strategies within their lessons to ensure they are ADHD Friendly.

Some support strategies may include:

- Minimised distractions through seating arrangements
- Visual timetables and structured routines
- Movement breaks or access to quiet spaces
- Regular check-ins with key staff

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Can ADHD affect academic performance?**

Yes, ADHD can affect concentration, organisation, and task completion. With the right support, students with ADHD can thrive both academically and socially.

### **Is medication the only solution?**

No. While some students benefit from medication, school routines, structure, and support at home also play a key role. We work with families and healthcare providers holistically.

### **Can my child get extra time in exams?**

A diagnosis of ADHD does not automatically guarantee exam adjustments. At GCSE and A Level, Exam Access Arrangements (EAAs) must:

- Be evidence-based through school data and teacher observations
- Reflect normal classroom practice
- Be formally applied for through the Access Arrangements Online (AAO) system
- Meet JCQ criteria





# ADHD FRIENDLY CLASSROOMS

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## **3 PRESENTATIONS OF ADHD**

### **Inattentive**

Issues with concentration and attention though not usually impulsive or overactive.

### **Hyperactive/Impulsive**

Issues with being overactive or impulsive.

### **Combined**

Issues with concentration and attention with overactive and impulsive behaviours.

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## **IN THE CLASSROOM TEACHERS WILL AIM TO...**

- Be patient and tolerant – instructions may be repeated if pupils do not understand first time or even second or third time
- Maintain consistent classroom routines – change can create distraction, uncertainty and confusion

## **SEATING ARRANGEMENTS**

- Seat pupils with ADHD beside less distractible pupils
- Seat pupils with ADHD near the front, away from distractions (eg. busy noticeboards, the door, window etc).

## **TEACHING STRATEGIES**

- Give prior information about what will be happening where possible
- Teach sequences in order to help pupils get their thoughts on the page
- Scaffold work into shorter steps to help with sequencing and focus
- Use mnemonics which can be useful for important information
- Repeat instructions individually using the pupil name if necessary
- Use visual maps
- Colour code different steps, themes or information
- Teach the use of flash cards
- Teach the use of memory prompts – checklists, written reinforcements of verbal instructions
- Give pupils jobs to do eg. give out books or handouts if movement breaks are needed
- Use a variety of activities throughout the lesson
- Consider alternative ways that pupils can show their learning
- Present only 1 or 2 activities on each sheet of paper
- Use special cue phrases to stimulate interest eg. ‘Now for the interesting bit..’ ‘The next clip is amazing..’ ‘We’re nearly there now...’

## ADHD Friendly Classrooms cont'd

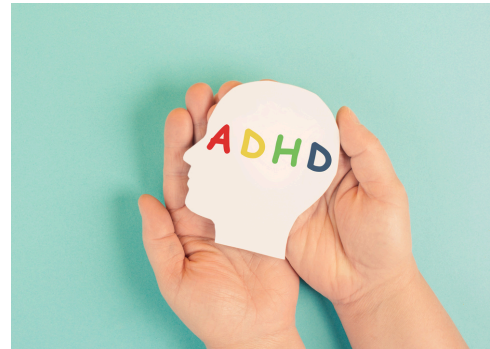
### HOMEWORK:

*It takes pupils with ADHD up to 3 times as long to do the same assignment in the home environment as it may do in the school setting.*

- Consider how they can differentiate homework eg present in alternative ways, set core homework and/or extension homework
- Provide rewards
- Encourage pupils to attend Homework Club

### BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- Set clear expectations for behaviour and communicate these with pupils
- Be consistent in their approach
- Address the pupil by name
- Keep instructions short and simple
- Make eye contact where they can
- Speak clearly and concisely, keeping their tone even
- Ask 'What should you be doing now?' rather than 'Why are you doing that?'
- Use 'When...' and 'Then...'
- Use regular, positive praise
- Catch the pupils being good – use a 4:1 ratio to encourage positive behaviour
- Take a fresh start approach each lesson



*Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and use of strategies may be dependent on the nature of the subject and the range of need within classes.*

# 10 ADHD FRIENDLY STRATEGIES TEACHERS USE IN THE CLASSROOM

**SHORT AND  
SIMPLE  
INSTRUCTIONS**

**MAINTAIN  
CONSISTENT  
ROUTINES**

**SEATING PLAN  
FOR ADHD PUPILS**

**BE PATIENT  
AND  
TOLERANT**

**INSTRUCTIONS  
REPEATED  
INDIVIDUALLY USING  
THE PUPIL NAME**

**TEACH SEQUENCES IN  
ORDER TO HELP PUPILS GET  
THEIR THOUGHTS ON PAPER**

**SCAFFOLD WORK INTO  
SHORTER STEPS TO HELP  
WITH SEQUENCING  
AND FOCUS**

**DIFFERENTIATION OF  
HOMEWORK OR PRESENT  
IT IN ALTERNATIVE WAYS**

**SET CORE HOMEWORK  
AND/OR EXTENSION HOMEWORK**

**ASKING 'WHAT  
SHOULD YOU BE  
DOING NOW?'  
RATHER THAN 'WHY  
ARE YOU DOING  
THAT?'**

**CATCH PUPILS  
BEING GOOD, USE  
A 4:1 RATIO**

**4 POSITIVE COMMENTS FOR EVERY  
NEGATIVE ONE**

## EXAM ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

### Exam Access Arrangements (EAAs)

Typical Exam Access Arrangements may include:

- 25% Extra time
- Use of a reader or scribe
- Rest breaks
- Alternative rooming (previously known as Separate Accommodation)

### EAAs are:

- Not automatic – diagnosis alone is not sufficient. Medical professionals or advisory organisations may make recommendations but these must be supported by clear evidence from school
- Based on evidence of need as demonstrated through what a child needs to complete assessments in school eg. teacher observations, school data
- Reflective of the child's usual classroom/assessment experience
- Applied for according to JCQ deadlines and rules

### Please note:

Pupils who routinely use EAA in KS3 may also need to undergo further specialist assessments in school as part of meeting JCQ regulations.

To access extra time for example, there needs to be a clear indication that the child has issues with processing unless there is a specific physical medical diagnosis or statement of need in place. At all times, the school must adhere to JCQ regulations.

## ADVICE FOR HOME SUPPORT - WHAT CAN PARENTS DO AT HOME?

### SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

- Encourage reading (books, audiobooks, magazines – Libraries NI offer a range of Dyslexia Friendly books)
- Practice spelling using games or apps
- Help with organisation (planners, checklists, regular monitoring of the homework diary)
- Celebrate effort, not just results
- Communicate regularly with school
- Support the child to use assistive technology eg. Immersive reader on Word

**The following websites may be useful:**

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/children/guidance-for-parents>

<https://www.nidyslexiacentre.co.uk/>

### SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH ADHD

- Use clear and consistent routines
- Break tasks into small steps
- Use visual timetables or checklists
- Offer praise and encouragement
- Stay in touch with school staff

**The following website may be useful:**

<https://addni.org/>

## ADVICE FOR HOME SUPPORT - WHAT CAN PARENTS DO AT HOME?

### SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH ASD

- Keep routines consistent and prepare for change
- Encourage communication in a way that suits the child
- Support their interests and strengths
- Share effective strategies with the school
- Connect with autism support groups
- Provide a safe place a home for the child to regulate at home – this is important if the child has been masking in school all day

**The following website may be useful:**

<https://autismni.org/>

## HOW ARE TEACHERS MADE AWARE OF MY CHILD'S NEEDS?

### ALL TEACHING STAFF RECEIVE:

- Access to the SEN/Medical Register updated regularly
- Student PLPs and any statements or medical protocols where applicable
- Continuous Professional Development
- Advice and training on inclusive classroom practice through sharing of good practice within the school and from external agencies

### TEACHERS USE THIS INFORMATION TO:

- Differentiate tasks and resources
- Apply recommended support strategies
- Deliver inclusive and personalised learning

## WHO SHOULD PARENTS CONTACT?

You can speak to their child's Subject Teacher, Form Teacher or Head of Year.

Any member of teaching staff should be able to speak to you about what they do to support your child based on their knowledge and experience of the child in the classroom.

Diagnosis of any medical need must be provided to the Learning Support Department so that the child can be placed onto the medical or SEN register.

To be placed on the SEN register, there must be clear evidence of need of support over and above what is offered in the classroom. This is done in consultation with the Learning Support Department.

The Learning Support Department email address is...

***[learningsupport@lagancollege.com](mailto:learningsupport@lagancollege.com)***

