



Supporting the self-esteem and mental health of children and young people with dyslexia

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Challenges for all children and young people*



Mental health or mental disorder?

Crisis in the classroom?

* and adults

- **Young Minds** - <https://youngminds.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/wise-up/>
- *“There is a mental health crisis in our classrooms. 3 children in every classroom have a diagnosable mental disorder and 90% of school leaders have reported an increase in the last 5 years in the number of students experiencing anxiety, stress, low mood or depression.”*
- **ChildLine** – reported 8% increase over 4 years in young people making contact about a serious mental health problem

Health behaviours in school-aged children

- Self-reported wellbeing is measurable
- The Health Behaviours in School-aged Children is a research network which collects data every 4 years on young people aged 11-15 years on health, wellbeing, social environments and health behaviours.
- This has been going for over 30 years and now includes 48 countries in Europe and North America, including Scotland
- 1/6 of the world's population – research, policy change
- <http://www.hbsc.org/>
- Promotes early identification of emotional problems

Why identify dyslexia?

- We have a needs-led system of support in Scotland.
- Why give someone a label?
- We have good synthetic phonics programme in place?
- No identification is required for SQA exam arrangements.



Is there really a need to identify dyslexia?

Why identify dyslexia?

Comments from adults whose dyslexia was not identified at school.

I always knew there was something not quite right with my learning, and it was a relief to get a diagnosis. I was scared that I wasn't actually dyslexic and just stupid.

There was no drive for identification. I was stupid and that was that.

No-one every picked up on it at school or university ... I got good grades at school (mostly), and I believe this was one of the reasons no one questioned my learning difficulties.

I felt I let my parents down and was a disappointment.

Why identify dyslexia?

When I found out I was dyslexic the relief I had was amazing.

I didn't want my dyslexia to define me, but it was helpful for me to know.

It was like the missing puzzle piece. Now things make sense.

Of course, everyone is different but I know (being identified) would have made school a lot easier for me.

Why identify dyslexia?



- We have a needs-led system of support in Scotland. (a good understanding of dyslexia can help to identify exactly which needs to meet and how to do this)
- Why give someone a label? (identification of dyslexia could be seen as an explanation of someone's combination of strengths and challenges)
- We have good synthetic phonics programme in place (but literacy may not be the only barrier to learning)
- No identification is required for SQA exam arrangements. (more requests for assessment arrangements citing dyslexia as a reason are made than the numbers of pupils identified with dyslexia)

Is there really a need to identify dyslexia?



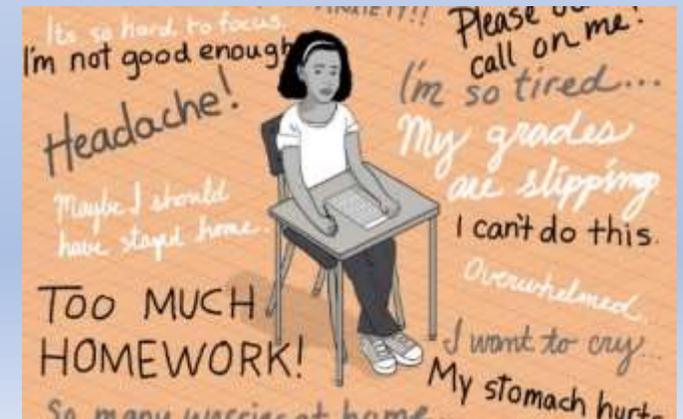
Some reasons ...

- Census of ASN – 10% of population?
- Important to the child or young person in terms of self-identity and mental health
- Dyslexia exists before and outwith school and learning to read
- Literacy may not be the only the barrier to learning
- Planning for future needs
- And ...?



Risks for mental health of unsupported dyslexia and unmet needs

- Feeling stupid or different
- Failing to attain and achieve
- Lack of resilience
- “masking” or stealth dyslexia (comparable to ASD in adolescent females)
- Increasing demands at school (CfE, new NQs)
- Stress, anxiety, no longer coping
- Feelings of failure, despair, panic
- Exhaustion
- **Poor mental health, self-esteem**
- (don't forget the impact upon parents ...)



What to look out for in young people with unidentified dyslexia and who may overwork to compensate ...

- Never giving up
- Re-doing work
- Overworking
- Negative thoughts (*I don't know why I bother. I'll fail anyway.*)
- Negative self-talk (*why are you so stupid?*)
- Emotional – sometimes disproportionate levels of distress
- Reporting “a voice” giving instructions or berating

I always forget things

My spelling is terrible

I'm fed up trying hard – no one understands me

I'm stupid because I can't read very well

I have good ideas but I find it hard getting them down onto paper

I get really tired at school

My writing is messy

I can't remember my times-tables no matter how hard I try

If you have dyslexia combined with low self-esteem and poor mental health, you may be your own worst critic.

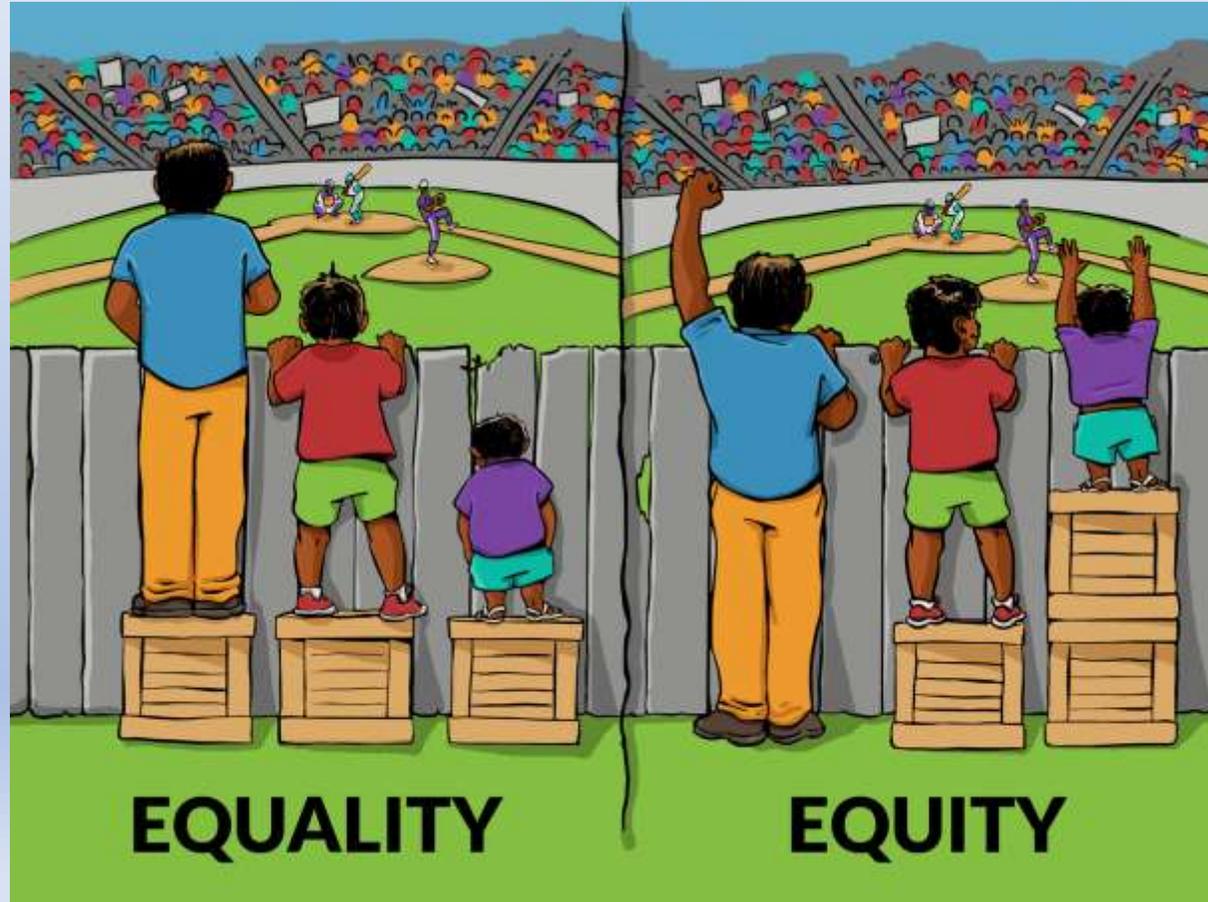


The view of an adolescent Consultant Psychiatrist (CAMHS)

Sometimes it seems hard for people to be honest about dyslexia and it's not helpful because **young people then blame themselves** when they can't get things done

There needs to be **significant and consistent help** available. So often I hear that things are "supposed to be happening" in schools or there's a plan on paper but there are still many reported occasions when that doesn't actually happen. There will always be a variety of adjustments that are required for young people to access learning and it would be better just to **get them all out in the open!**

Being upfront about needs



After identification, what next?

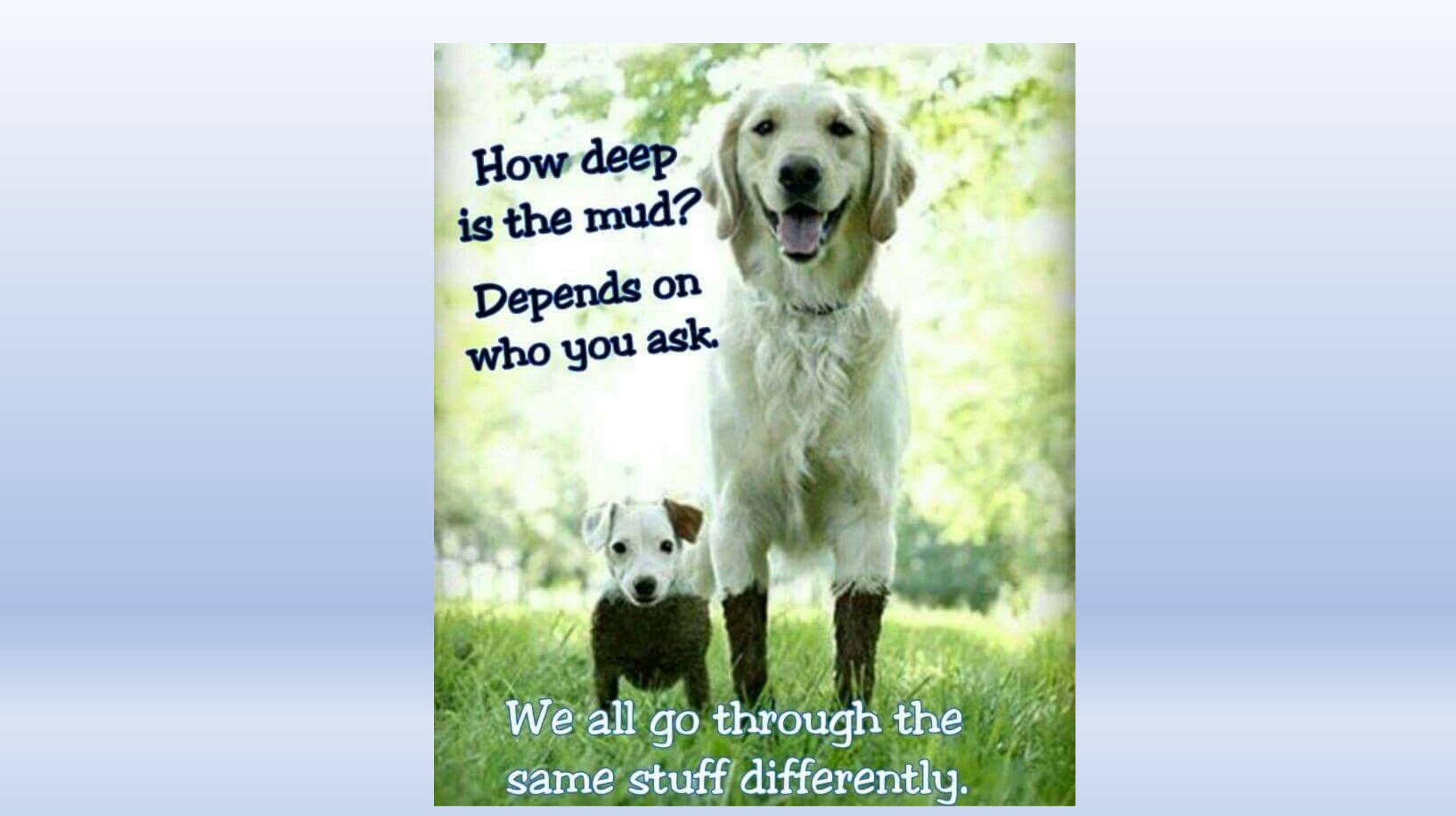
- Meet the needs, as best you can, of every child and young person, including those with dyslexia. What can you do in the here and now to support the child in front of you?
- Create a culture of openness and honesty where dyslexia is freely spoken about



Meet the needs of every child and young person as best you can

- Be the teacher that a child feels able to talk to ☺
- Be creative and resourceful and empathetic
- Nurture, but challenge too
- Know the needs of the children and plan around the needs
- Put in every support you can think of: enable every child to attain and to achieve
- Build resilience
- Promote equity, not just equality





**How deep
is the mud?**

**Depends on
who you ask.**

**We all go through the
same stuff differently.**

Create a culture of openness and honesty

- Inclusive practice or 'dyslexia friendly' approaches
- Talk about dyslexia openly and frankly
- Grasp opportunities to raise awareness (eg DAW)
- Involve the whole school and the wider community
- Support you colleagues



Supporting young people with our feedback



- Importance of feedback
- Praise and encouragement – praise effort (not ability)
- What about young people experiencing mental health challenges? (*some yp might struggle with praise ... how could you feed back in a way that doesn't invalidate their feelings?)
- What do young people need? →



How are you?



Find ways to have conversations/activities that will allow children to talk and open up about their worries and anxieties.

If you can be open and honest about dyslexia, it leaves the door open for people to be open and honest about other things too.

YOU DON'T
HAVE TO BE
PERFECT
TO BE
Amazing

'Dyslexia Friendly School' project approaches

- Awareness raising assemblies with children leading and participating
- Competitions (eg "Spotted"; win a golden ticket to meet a therapy dog)
- Posters in every classroom
- Support for families and carers
- "Dyslexia friendly tip of the week" in the staff bulletin
- Showing that you listen and that you are proactive in your support

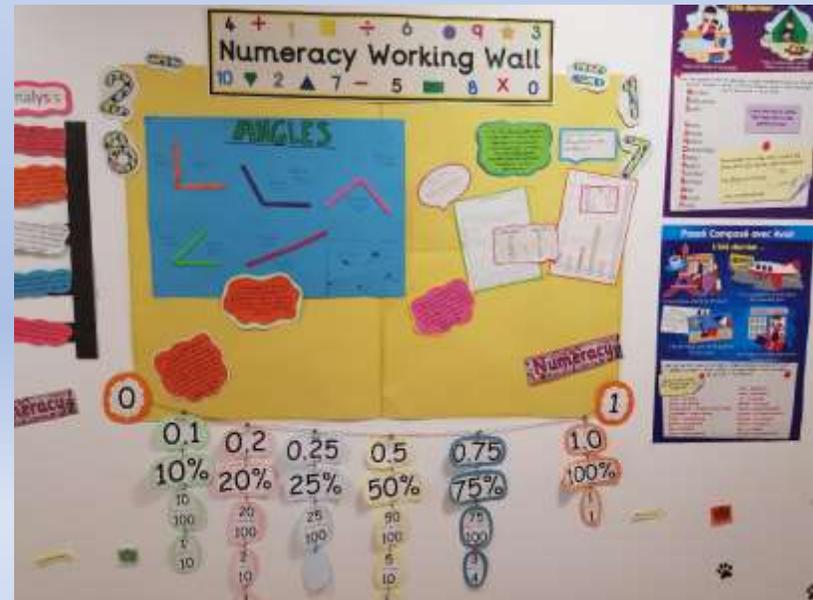
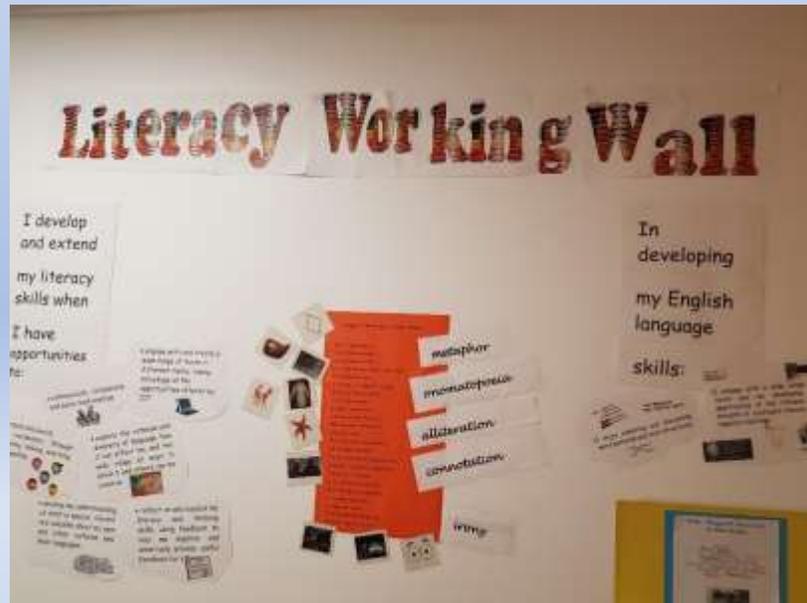
My experience of a 'Dyslexia Friendly School' project

- 10+ % of pupils were identified with dyslexia
- Every year more and more pupils were sitting exams with support arrangements
- Pupils felt able to approach staff with difficulties, including mental health challenges
- Teachers and other adults also felt supported
- Increased parental engagement
- Everyone in the learning community was involved and supported

Celebrating Neurodiversity

(famous people but don't forget real people too!)





Thank you for listening and participating!



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- See accompanying handout with resources to use to support mental health and wellbeing

Dyslexia Scotland Education Conference 27 th October 2018	
Children and childhood now: current pressures affecting all young people Resources to support children and young people with dyslexia and additional mental health challenges	
	CLPL/Information for teachers/tutors
FutureLearn (Open University/Lancaster University) – free online CLPL	https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/mental-health-and-well-being
"Psychology and Mental Health"	
"Youth Mental Health – Helping Young People with Dyslexia"	https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/youth-mental-health

- CAMHS and Hospital Education Teachers Facebook Page (@camhsteachers)

