

Dyslexia, Learning Support And All Things Special...

We all dream of our children excelling at school – in maths, English, sport or music, but for some children, just getting through the normal school day can be challenging enough, and this can add extra stress to families considering, or already in the process of an international assignment.

With a bit of luck, a pupil's school will flag up any learning difficulties around Year 2 and suggest an assessment, although many children with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) can remain undiagnosed for much longer. Parents may have suspected their child was not keeping up even though his or her intelligence appeared 'normal' otherwise it could come as a bolt out of the blue. It is at this stage that parents usually wonder what they should be doing.

A good school will probably recommend an educational psychologist (EP) and this will be the next step to finding out what the difficulties are and how serious. You can access a good list of EPs through the BDA. An EP will assess the child by performing a series of tests designed to calculate verbal and non-verbal reasoning as well as general cognitive ability. Parents will receive a report with the results of the administered tests and a recommendation on how to address the child's needs. The sort of difficulties identified by an educational psychologist cover a broad range from Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Discalcula, Aspergers or ADHD/ADD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Attention Deficit Disorder), all on the Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) spectrum.

There are many independent schools that offer specialist teaching outside of the classroom, but for children with moderate to severe difficulties this minimal intervention is like "papering over the cracks". In many cases, there are children unable to cope in a mainstream school environment and who need something more specialist. For parents in the expat community this will be a particular concern, not only will their child have to cope with a completely new home environment and new friends, but also a new school. If confidence levels are low due to previous poor achievement,

then this will add to the family's anxieties at an already stressful time.

Much of the difficult part of the transition can be avoided by transferring a child to a school that specialises in the teaching of children who require more individual learning support. This is where the child will get a complete an individual programme of the help they need including occupational and speech and language therapy, as well as counselling where necessary, all incorporated into their school day.

Specialist schools provide children diagnosed with a SpLD the opportunity of receiving an academic education in a safe and supportive learning environment up to GCSE for children between the ages of 11 to 16 years. CRESTeD produces a useful handbook and their website gives a list of accredited schools.

It comes as no surprise to parents that their children often possess extraordinary talents and creativity and it is an important goal for these schools to identify and foster this by providing additional courses in non-traditional subjects such as creative and performing arts, food technology, computer technology, art and design, media studies and design technology. Pupils will need individual timetables that address their needs and classes must be small with a high teacher/pupil ratio. Look for a school that offers an enrichment programme that enhances the pupil's skills academically, emotionally and socially.

It is well known that progress of pupils at these type of holistic specialist schools are typically outstanding. This reinforces the belief that, given the opportunity and resources at the right age, despite their difficulties, these children can make meaningful improvements to the quality of their lives and their contributions to society.

Helping parents find their way through the minefield of special education is not easy, but follow these steps and you could put them on the right track:

1. Do some research, this will pay enormous dividends
2. Get free advice from the numerous agencies there to help. In the UK this will be the British Dyslexia Association, CRESTeD, and the Helen Arkell centre

3. Make sure there is an up to date assessment of the child's special needs
4. Encourage research in possible schools in the country the families are relocating to
5. Speak to professionals such as educational psychologists, therapists and specialist tutors
6. Consider an educational consultant who will know and understand schools in the destination area of relocation and who will be able to follow a particular brief. Especially useful if there is no time for research.

There are many alternative therapies and treatments around, but it is the view of many professionals that repetitive and intensive teaching from qualified teachers experienced in the teaching of children with SpLD pays the best educational dividends. With proper diagnosis and tailored educational practises, children with SpLD can go on to achieve academically, reach their full potential and have successful careers and future lives.



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last remaining founding Director and Trustee on the Board of the Moat School. She set-up the charity, The Constable Educational Trust, in 1994 to establish London's first secondary school for Dyslexic children. She has spent the last three years as a Project Director setting up and opening two Free Schools in challenging inner city areas of London with the aim of improving life chances of all children. As a flagship Government initiative, it is her aim to expand the Trust to a small group of London based primary schools where CETPS can have the most impact. Ronda's early career began as a retail buyer and she worked for major multiples including WH Smith, Debenhams, Tesco and Marks & Spencer. She is also a business mentor working with young entrepreneurs in London.