



Learning Support – Tutor Guidance

Most recent update: 12 October 2026

Practical guidance for recognising need, planning support and creating inclusive learning

Core principle

Respond to the learner's presentation and identified barriers, not just a diagnosis or label. Many inclusive approaches benefit everyone and can be built into routine teaching.

Purpose of this guidance

This guidance helps tutors recognise when an adult learner may need additional support and how to choose practical, proportionate strategies. It is a reference document rather than a diagnostic tool. Every learner is different, so support should be discussed with the learner, recorded appropriately and reviewed for impact.

Important: a formal diagnosis is not always needed before support can be considered. Focus on the evidence of need, the barrier to learning, the support provided and the difference it makes.

Inclusive practice and additional learning support

Good inclusive teaching should be the starting point for every class. Some learners will also need targeted or individual support that is additional to, or different from, the support routinely available to all learners.

- Universal inclusive practice: approaches available to everyone, such as clear instructions, visual timetables, accessible handouts and planned breaks
- Targeted support: extra help for a learner or small group, such as pre-teaching vocabulary, additional practice or regular check-ins
- Individual support: personalised adjustments or specialist input, such as assistive technology training, a communication support worker or an agreed assessment adjustment



Examples of learning difficulties, disabilities and other needs

Cognition and learning

- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia or Developmental Coordination Disorder
- Dyscalculia
- Moderate or severe learning difficulties
- Processing difficulties, working memory difficulties or low prior attainment linked to an identified learning need

Neurodivergence

- ADHD or ADD
- Autism
- Executive functioning difficulties
- Neurodivergent presentation without a formal diagnosis

Communication and interaction

- Speech, language and communication needs
- Social communication differences
- Selective mutism or significant communication anxiety

Sensory needs

- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment or Deafness
- Dual sensory loss
- Sensory processing differences

Physical or medical needs

- Mobility or dexterity difficulties
- Chronic pain or fatigue
- Epilepsy, diabetes or other long-term conditions affecting learning
- Recovery from significant illness or injury

Mental health and emotional needs

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Other recognised conditions that create a substantial barrier to learning

Other barriers requiring consideration

- Hidden disabilities
- Temporary but significant impairments
- English language needs alongside SEND
- Multiple or interacting needs



Recognising and responding to need

Tutors should not diagnose. Instead, notice patterns, have a respectful conversation, identify barriers and work with the learner and relevant colleagues to agree support.

1. Ask what helps the learner learn well and what they find difficult.
2. Check booking information and existing support arrangements, including employment support or Independent Travel Training.
3. Observe the impact of the barrier across different activities and environments.
4. Agree practical strategies with the learner and avoid making assumptions based on a label.
5. Record the support clearly on the correct course or learner paperwork. Record on the course booking sheet and get any adjustments signed off by a member of the quality team – see separate Learning Support process
6. Review whether the support improves access, participation, independence, progress or achievement.

Examples of support by area of need

Many suggestions for support cross over into different areas of need. Every learner is different, so it is important to focus on supporting the learner and addressing their barriers and behaviours, rather than focusing on a diagnosis.

Area of need	Possible support and adjustments
Dyslexia and literacy processing	• accessible font and uncluttered layout of course materials • learner materials in at least 14-point font (or larger where required) • extra processing time • reading rulers or overlays • text-to-speech • speech-to-text • audio instructions • structured literacy support • key vocabulary in advance • alternative ways to record learning
Dyspraxia and coordination issues	• demonstrate practical tasks in sequence • allow extra time for movement, handwriting and equipment use • reduce copying • provide stable and uncluttered workspaces



	• use checklists and visual models • offer keyboarding or speech-to-text • check safe access to tools • allow repeated practice without pressure
Dyscalculia and numeracy processing	• concrete resources and worked examples • number lines or calculators where permitted • consistent methods • step-by-step prompts • visual representation of quantity • additional practice • reduced visual clutter • check understanding of symbols and place value
ADHD and executive functioning	• short task chunks • visible timers • agreed use of phone alarms • tick-off lists • movement or brain breaks • clear start and finish points • planned check-ins • reduced distractions • support with prioritising, materials, deadlines and routines
Autism and social communication	• predictable routines • visual timetable • advance notice of change • literal and unambiguous language • clear expectations • sensory considerations • low-stimulus option • communication cards • structured group roles • preparation for unfamiliar situations
Speech, language and communication	• plain language • one idea at a time • visual or symbol support • modelled answers • additional response time



	• checking understanding without putting the learner on the spot • communication support worker or specialist advice where available
Hearing impairment and deafness	• Face the learner when speaking • good lighting • reduce background noise • captions and transcripts • written key points • assistive listening equipment • BSL interpreter or communication support worker • agreed seating position
Visual impairment	• Large print or preferred digital format • high contrast • verbalise board content and demonstrations • accessible electronic documents • screen reader or magnification • clear routes and consistent room layout • orientation and mobility support
Disability, mobility and dexterity	• accessible room and workstation • adjusted seating or desk height • extra movement time • adapted equipment • alternative method for practical activity where appropriate • accessible breaks and facilities • support with handling materials while preserving independence
Medical condition, pain or fatigue	• flexible pacing • rest breaks • adjusted timetable or deadlines • access to medication and agreed recovery space in line with organisational procedures • catch-up plan for absence • seating and temperature adjustments



	• emergency or individual healthcare arrangements where relevant
Mental health and emotional regulation	• predictable routines • private check-ins • calm space • manageable goals • reduced public pressure • agreed plan for re-entry after absence • wellbeing or specialist referral routes • supportive but boundaries around communication
Moderate or severe learning difficulty	• highly scaffolded teaching • concrete and functional examples • repetition and overlearning • small steps • frequent feedback • symbol or visual support • additional adult support • clear links to independence and real-life application
ESOL alongside SEND	• do not assume every difficulty is caused by language acquisition • use visuals, modelling and pre-teaching • distinguish language need from persistent processing or communication barriers • allow bilingual tools where appropriate • seek specialist assessment when needed
Assessment access needs	• supervised rest breaks • extra time where approved • reader, scribe or assistive technology • separate or smaller room • modified papers • alternative evidence methods where regulations permit



	Follow awarding organisation rules and obtain approval before assessment
--	--

Free and built-in assistive technology

This includes Microsoft Immersive Reader and Read Aloud for listening to written text, Windows Voice Typing or Microsoft Word Dictate for converting speech into writing, Google Docs Voice Typing, Chromebook Select-to-Speak and Dictation, and Apple Speak Screen, Speak Selection and Dictation. Availability may depend on the device, software version, IT settings and internet connection.

Learners may need an initial demonstration, a suitable headset or microphone, accessible digital copies of learning materials and time to practise. The aim should be to help the learner use the technology confidently and independently.

Examples of support by cognitive discipline

Cognitive discipline	Possible support and adjustments
Planning, organising and independence	- weekly planner or one-page course overview - prompts for bringing equipment and meeting deadlines - breaking assignments into milestones with review dates - modelling how to start a task, then fading prompts over time - consistent folder, file-naming or colour-coding system - travel training or employment support delivered alongside the course
Reading, writing and recording	- pre-teaching unfamiliar vocabulary - glossaries with plain-English definitions and images - writing frames, paragraph planners and sentence starters - cloze activities, where selected words are omitted for learners to complete



	• choice of typed, spoken, photographed or demonstrated evidence were valid • copies of board notes so the learner does not have to listen and copy simultaneously
Attention, memory and processing	• one instruction or one short set of related instructions at a time • key instructions provided both verbally and visually • retrieval practice, recap and overlearning • wait time after questions • worked examples kept visible during independent practice • visual timer or agreed alarm to show how long much time remains
Communication and participation	• advance warning before asking a learner to contribute • alternatives to speaking in front of the full group • structured roles in group work • communication cards for requesting help or a break • checking understanding with open prompts such as "What is the first step?" • avoiding idioms, sarcasm and unnecessarily abstract language when clarity is important
Sensory and environmental access	• choice of seating where possible • reduced background noise and visual clutter • appropriate lighting, ventilation and room temperature • permission to use agreed sensory aids or noise-reducing headphones when safe • clear routes, accessible furniture and predictable room layout • named place the learner may use for a short, regulated break



Emotional wellbeing and confidence	• regular, brief check-ins • clear feedback that identifies success and the next small step • preparation for changes, assessments and unfamiliar activities • re-engagement plan following absence • signposting or referral through appropriate organisational routes • consistent boundaries and realistic expectations
Digital access and assistive technology	• Microsoft Immersive Reader or equivalent reading support • text-to-speech and speech-to-text • live captions and transcripts • screen magnification, contrast and keyboard accessibility settings • digital reminders, calendars and task apps • training and practice so the learner can use the technology independently
Transition and progression	• taster visits and orientation to a new venue • simple map, photographs or step-by-step route guide • support to disclose needs appropriately in employment or further learning • practice with workplace communication and reasonable adjustment requests • warm handover to the next tutor, provider or support service, with consent



Detailed approaches in practice

Social communication support

This may support learners with autism, speech and language needs, ADHD, social anxiety or other communication differences. Support should be respectful, adult-appropriate and linked to real situations.

- one-to-one or small-group coaching, turn-taking, conversational cues and managing disagreement
- rehearsing how to ask for help, join a group, speak to a colleague or prepare for a presentation
- structured group activities with defined roles and clear expectations
- scripts, communication cards, visual prompts and short social scenarios
- graded preparation for situations that cause anxiety, planned with the learner and within staff competence

Specialist tuition and targeted intervention

- Structured literacy or numeracy teaching
- Sequencing and planning support for writing
- Memory, study and revision strategies
- Time-management and organisation coaching
- Additional practice of practical or vocational skills
- Pre-teaching and revisiting key concepts

Mentoring and wider team support

- regular progress and attendance check-ins
- support to set manageable goals and monitor deadlines
- employment support, job coaching or Independent Travel Training
- mediation following communication difficulties
- support to build confidence, self-advocacy and independence
- coordination with relevant colleagues so support is consistent and not duplicated

Safe and supported spaces

- quiet area for short rest or regulation breaks
- clear information about where to go, how long the break may last and how to return to learning
- sensory tools where appropriate
- plan for unstructured times such as breaks and lunch
- named member of staff or agreed contact route when the learner needs help



Inclusive approaches that can benefit the whole class

The following approaches can be built into everyday teaching. They reduce barriers without singling learners out, while still enabling additional individual support where needed.

- Display a visual timetable and refer to it throughout the session
- Give a clear lesson purpose and success criteria
- Use numbered steps, bullet points and tick-off lists
- Chunk explanations and tasks into manageable sections
- Limit simultaneous instructions and present them in a logical sequence
- Provide verbal instructions in written or visual form as well
- Model or demonstrate before expecting independent work
- Use diagrams, images, objects, demonstrations and mind maps to reinforce meaning
- Keep learner-facing materials uncluttered, with readable font size and strong contrast
- Where useful, vary line colour or use reading guides to help tracking, while avoiding distracting colour combinations
- Allow thinking time after questions and before expecting answers
- Build in recap, retrieval practice and overlearning
- Offer planned rest, movement or brain breaks
- Use visible timers or allow agreed phone alarms for task timing
- Provide sentence starters, writing frames or cloze activities when these support learning
- Pre-teach key vocabulary and explain technical terms in plain English
- Offer more than one appropriate way to participate or show understanding
- Caption videos and provide key written points
- Make routines predictable and give advance notice of changes
- Check understanding across the class rather than repeatedly singling out one learner

Remember: inclusive teaching does not mean every learner receives exactly the same thing. It means barriers are anticipated, routine teaching is accessible and additional support is provided when a learner needs it.

Reviewing whether support is working

Use the following prompts to review the effectiveness of interventions:

- Is the learner able to access the learning activity?
- Has participation, confidence, attendance or independence improved?
- Is the learner making progress towards their goals?
- Does the learner say the support is helpful and respectful?
- Can prompts be reduced as confidence and independence grow?
- Are any new barriers becoming apparent?
- Does the support need to be changed, escalated or discussed with a colleague?



Often, a small adjustment made for the whole class improves access for everyone. Inclusive practice is not always about creating a completely different activity for each learner. It is about removing predictable barriers and adding personalised support where needed.

Teach to the presentation, not the label

Neurodivergent learners do not all present in the same way and learners with the same diagnosis may need very different support. Respond to the behaviour, communication style, sensory need or learning barrier that is visible, while discussing strategies with the learner.

Build flexible approaches into teaching so they are available to everyone, then add individual adjustments where required.

Changes you can make

Environment

- Room layout, clear walkways and access to exits and facilities
- Seating choice and the learner's position in relation to the board, tutor, door, windows and distractions
- Lighting, glare, flicker and screen visibility
- Background noise, echo and competing conversations
- Temperature, ventilation and strong smells
- Visual clutter on walls, tables, slides and handouts
- Predictability of routines and advance notice of room or timetable changes
- Access to a quieter space or agreed break area
- Safe use of sensory aids, headphones, movement and fidget tools
- Clear information about where resources are stored and what will happen next

Language, voice and delivery

- Use plain, direct and respectful adult language
- Keep sentences concise and avoid unnecessary idioms, sarcasm or figurative language when these may cause confusion
- Give one idea at a time and pause between key points
- Use a steady pace, clear volume and calm tone
- Use downward intonation at the end of instructions and statements where possible
Rising intonation can make a statement sound like a question or create uncertainty
- Emphasise key words without exaggerating or speaking in a patronising way
- Allow processing time before repeating or rephrasing
- Say exactly what the learner needs to do, by when and what a completed task should look like
- Support spoken language with written key words, symbols, diagrams or demonstrations



- Check understanding by asking the learner or group to explain the first step, rather than asking only “Do you understand?”

Chunking instructions

Chunking means breaking information or a task into a small number of meaningful steps. This reduces demand on working memory and can support learners with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, language needs, anxiety and other processing differences.

Example: instead of “Open the document, read the case study, highlight the risks, discuss them with your partner and write a response,” try, “1 - open the document; 2 - read the first paragraph; 3- highlight two risks” Then pause and check. Then give the next steps.

- Limit the number of instructions given at one time where possible
- Put steps in a logical order and number them
- Keep the steps visible while learners work
- Ask the class: “What are we doing first?” or “What comes next?”
- Invite a learner to repeat or paraphrase the instruction, without making this feel like a test
- Recap instructions after transitions or interruptions
- Use repetition and overlearning so routines become familiar
- Reduce prompts gradually when the learner can complete the sequence independently

Readable materials and visual support

- For learner-facing handouts, consider a minimum size 14 font where this improves access. Individual learners may need larger print or a preferred digital format
- Use a clear sans-serif font, generous spacing, left alignment and strong contrast
- Avoid long blocks of italics, underlining, capital letters and crowded text
- Use bullet points and short lists to simplify instructions
- Use diagrams, imagery, mind maps, worked examples and demonstrations
- Colour can help tracking, such as alternating line colours on the board, but use it consistently and ensure contrast remains clear
- Use cloze activities carefully: remove selected key words from a sentence or paragraph and provide a word bank when appropriate. Cloze tasks should check or reinforce learning, not create an unnecessary memory test

Rest and brain breaks

- Plan short breaks before attention or regulation is exhausted
- Explain where learners may go, how long the break is and how they will rejoin the session
- Offer a brief movement, stretching, hydration or quiet reflection break
- Use short breathing or grounding activities as an optional class strategy, without requiring disclosure or participation
- Allow time after complex input so learners can process and consolidate information



- Agree individual rest breaks for fatigue, pain, sensory overload, anxiety or assessment access needs, following relevant procedures

Dyspraxia: practical reminders

- Allow extra time for handwriting, movement, equipment use and practical tasks
- Demonstrate the complete task, then repeat it one stage at a time
- Use consistent positioning of tools and resources
- Reduce unnecessary copying and provide notes or templates
- Offer keyboarding, speech-to-text or other recording options where appropriate
- Use checklists, visual sequences and physical markers to support organisation
- Provide a stable chair and suitable workspace, and check whether clutter or crowded routes create difficulty
- Build in repeated, low-pressure practice to develop motor planning and confidence
- Give clear safety instructions and consider whether adapted equipment or specialist advice is needed
- Avoid interpreting slow, awkward or untidy work as lack of effort

**Inclusive Teaching Checklist**

Before or during the session, check	
☐	A visual timetable or session outline is displayed
☐	Instructions are short, numbered and available in more than one format
☐	The first step and expected outcome are clear
☐	Materials are readable, uncluttered and accessible
☐	Examples or demonstrations are provided before independent work
☐	Learners have thinking and processing time
☐	Timers, tick lists and planned breaks are used where helpful
☐	The environment has been checked for noise, light, clutter, access and seating
☐	Learners know how to ask for help or take an agreed break
☐	Understanding is checked respectfully and support is reviewed for impact

Final reminder

Reasonable, inclusive adjustments should preserve dignity and promote independence. Ask the learner what will help, agree appropriate support, record it clearly and review its impact.