

From teacher to 'detectologist'

Welcome to Module 4 of your SEN toolkit!

In this module we will help you not just be able to identify the signs and signals that could point to a special educational need, but we will also give you insights into understanding these behaviours.

Aims

By the end of this module, I will be able to:

- recognise the basic signs of SEN
- use different approaches to measurement to identify basic signs of SEN
- understand that recognition, understanding and empathy is more important than diagnosis



Test yourself

What do you already know about identifying neurodiversity?

Complete the short quiz below. Answer questions 1-4 by choosing a, b or c. You can check the correct answers afterwards with a detailed explanation for each.

1. If a child is neurodiverse, he or she:

- a) can never expect to complete a mainstream school with good grades
- b) should be sent to a school for especially talented children
- c) is likely not to develop full potential unless neurodiversity is recognised by the teachers

2. If a child has a 'spiky' profile in the class, he or she:

- a) is extremely rude to everyone else in the class
- b) has an uneven performance in different subjects and tests
- c) is likely to fail in academic subjects and have good grades in art and music

3. Early or timely detection of SEN in a child:

- a) can make a world of difference to their opportunities in life
- b) does not make much difference, because the learning process is the same in any case
- c) is something that always happens by the age of 4 or 5

4. When it comes to timely detection of signs of SEN in a child:

- a) the teacher's role is secondary to that of parents and defectologists
- b) the teacher has a vital role, even though they are not experts
- c) the teacher's role is limited to implementation of a teaching programme

Answers

Now, check your answers and read the explanations for each of them.

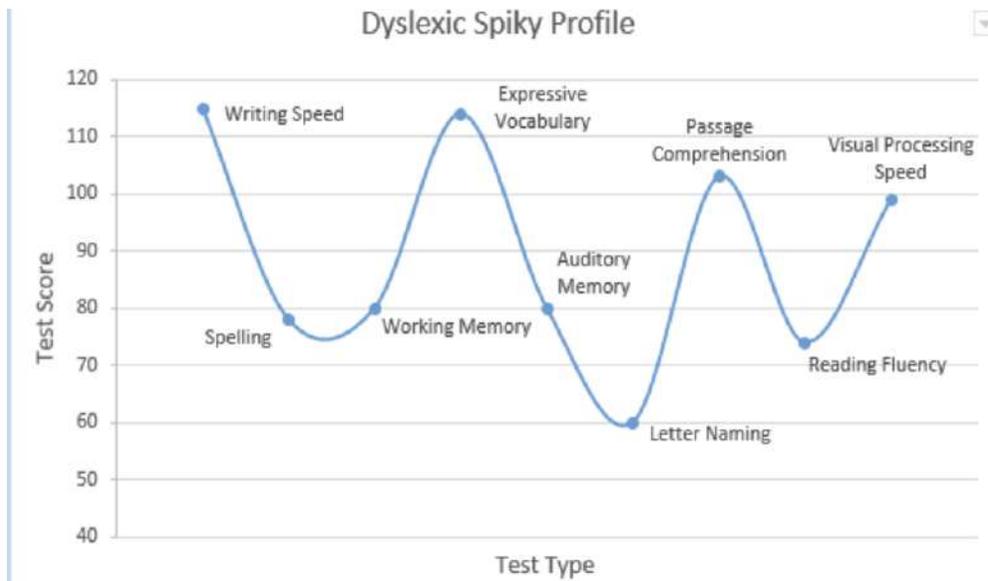
1. Correct answer is C.

The learning process of a neurodiverse child is different from that of a neurotypical child and as a rule requires a different methodological approach by the teacher.

2. Correct answer is B.

The 'Spiky profile' represents one of the most common and defining cognitive features of SEN students. Due to their neurodiversity, SEN students tend to demonstrate a highly uneven performance in cognitive and intelligence tests.

The following graph shows a typical dyslexic spiky profile, with a high inconsistency in scores:



3. Correct answer is A.

Timely detection of a neurodiversity is key to successful education and enabling an individual for a full and functional life.

4. Correct answer is B.

The role of a teacher is a vital one when it comes to proper and timely detection of a neurodiversity.

Video: ADHD Child vs Non-ADHD Child

In this section, you will learn about experiences of some schools and teachers in inclusive education.

Watch the short video in which two children answer the same questions. Which of the two children do you think has been diagnosed with ADHD? Watch the video and find out.



Play Video 

Or paste this link in your browser

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lO6zqlm88s>

Having seen the video, try to answer the following question:

What do you think are the most revealing signs of ADHD that occur in the interviews? Choose A, B or C.

1. Having good grades at school / performance at tests

a) Very revealing b) Not revealing c) Not sure

2. Having a lot of friends at school

a) Very revealing b) Not revealing c) Not sure

3. Enjoying doing homework

a) Very revealing b) Not revealing c) Not sure

4. Having a lot of self-esteem

a) Very revealing b) Not revealing c) Not sure

5. Changing mood

a) Very revealing b) Not revealing c) Not sure

Reflexive questions

What is it that the teacher could do to provide support to the ADHD child?

The video suggests that 'chances are there is at least one child in your child's class who is suffering from ADHD'. Is this also your situation?

Do you have any experience of teaching a child with ADHD? If so, how similar is the story shown in the video to your own experience?

How present is ADHD awareness in your teaching environment? How can it be improved? What positive changes would result from raising awareness of ADHD in your school?

The video lists issues such as 'bullying', 'low self-esteem', 'exclusion from social gatherings' and 'oppositional defiant behaviour'. How often are these related to SEN in your own teaching practice?

Detecting signs of SEN

In this section you will take the role of a teacher who has to deal with a series of difficult classroom situations, review a range of strategies and then think about your own practice.

Part one: Classroom situations

Start from Card 1 and read your classroom situation, then follow the instructions until you complete the activity. In each step, you will be asked to choose one possible course of action, A or B. Each chosen course of action will lead you to the next card, which explains the effect of your action and presents a next choice to be made. Once you have finished, go back to the starting card and explore the other options available to the teacher in these situations.

Card 1: Start

One of your pupils, Marco, has persistent poor performance in written tests, which is in contrast to his above-average engagement and verbal performance in class. Marco does not finish writing tasks on time and his comprehension of longer reading tasks is of an equally low standard. This has become an issue and you decide to take action. You want Marco to start producing written output that will match his oral performance in the class. What do you do?

- a) you assign additional homework, asking from Marco to copy texts from the textbook on a regular basis, for each lesson over three weeks. You feel that by increasing the workload he will have more practice and thus improve his skills.
Go to Card 2.

- b) you decide to caution Marco, so you tell him that he mustn't be so careless and negligent, and should instead work harder in order to improve his writing and reading really soon. **Go to Card 3.**

Card 2: Additional homework

Despite the extra homework, the problem persists... After a couple of weeks of regular extra workload, the situation has deteriorated. It has become clear that Marco cannot be motivated to improve his reading and writing, and he is now lagging even further behind his class and his work is messier than it was. You decide to:

- a) You decide to consult Marco's parents, as you feel that there must be a reason for his uneven performance and the resulting lack of interest in the activities during the lessons. **Go to Card 4.**
- b) You decide that you have had enough of Marco's misbehaviour and lack of interest and you start marking his assignments really strictly. Consequently, his grades deteriorate to the point when he is among the lowest-performing pupils in the class. You expect this will bring about the positive change in his learning. **Go to Card 5.**

Card 3: Caution

The caution seems to have no effect. What is more, Marco clearly cannot be motivated to improve his reading and writing, and he is now lagging even

further behind his class and his work is messier than it was. You decide to:

- a) You decide to consult Marco's parents, as you feel that there must be a reason for his uneven performance and the resulting lack of interest in the activities during the lessons. **Go to Card 4.**
- b) You decide that you have had enough of Marco's misbehaviour and lack of interest and you start marking his assignments really strictly. Consequently, his grades deteriorate to the point when he is among the lowest-performing pupils in the class. You expect this will bring about the positive change in his learning. **Go to Card 5.**

Card 4: Consult parents

The conversation with Marco's mother did not produce the expected results, as she seems to be largely uninterested in his school problems. You also learn that the parents seem to favour the older son, who has a very good school record. In the meantime, Marco is becoming more and more restless and undisciplined and more and more often in conflict with other pupils in the class. You decide to:

- a) You decide to talk to your colleagues, to find out if they might have an idea of what you should do in this situation, with a troublesome child in your class and no strategy leading to resolution. **Go to Card 6.**
- b) You decide to attend a seminar on cognitive capabilities in children, hoping to learn more about factors that may affect learning and lead to a 'spiky' learning profile such as the one present in your pupil Marco. **Go to Card 7.**

Card 5: Strict marking

Even though Marco's grades are very low now, this has not produced any positive effect on his performance – quite the contrary, he is continuously disinterested and there are further discipline issues which now threaten to escalate. What do you do?

- a) You decide to talk to your colleagues, to find out if they might have an idea of what you should do in this situation, with a troublesome child in your class and no strategy leading to resolution. **Go to Card 6.**
- b) You decide to attend a seminar on cognitive capabilities in children, hoping to learn more about factors that may affect learning and lead to a 'spiky' learning profile such as the one present in your pupil Marco. **Go to Card 7.**

Card 6: Consult colleagues

Having consulted some of the more experienced colleagues, you realise that Marco's behaviour may be a result of a neurodiversity. Eventually, you decide to make a referral for Marco to consult the defectologist in order to find out.

Go to Card 8.

Card 7: Additional homework

Having attended the specialist seminar, you realise that Marco's behaviour

may be a result of a neurodiversity. Eventually, you decide to make a referral for Marco to consult the defectologist in order to find out.

Go to Card 8.

Card 8: Conclusion

After several visits to the defectologist, Marco was diagnosed with dyslexia, opening a whole new chapter in your successful teaching practice.

Part two: Strategy review

When teachers encounter an issue of atypical behaviour or performance of a student, they often resort to some of the strategies that are considered proper, effective or necessary.

However well aligned with some standard practices and discipline procedures practised by schools, these decisions often fail to produce expected results. What is more, in recognising an undetected case of neurodiversity, these strategies can easily prove counter-productive.

Task

Read the introductions to story one and story two on the next page. The stories are about two students, Myra and Emma.

Then, look at the strategies below that were applied by their respective teachers in two different schools and try to decide which of the strategies 1-5 were used by Myra's teacher, and which by Emma's teacher.

In the spaces provided, write 'M' for Myra or 'E' for Emma. The first one has been done as an example.

1. Assigning extra work for student to do reading, instead of regular PE classes	E
2. Embarrassing a misbehaved student in front of the class	
3. Giving a student a bad mark for not respecting classroom rules	
4. Ignoring a student who behaves in an unacceptable manner	
5. Allowing / sending a restless student out of the classroom to 'cool off'	

Answers

1E, 2E, 3M, 4E, 5E

Introduction to story one – Myra

Myra was a student in my History class. Like the rest of the class, she was 15 years old. I soon noticed that she was rather withdrawn and did not engage in class activities. At times, she would play out and expressed oppositional behaviour. Her performance in written and oral tests seemed significantly impeded by her lack of initiative.

At that time, we did not know that Myra had a functional ASD, so I resorted to a series of unsuccessful attempts to discipline and engage her. I still regret many of these decisions, which I had made before finally making a referral for her to see the specialist.

Introduction to story two - Emma

My name is Emma and when I was twelve, I was diagnosed with ADHD. Even though you may think that the diagnosis must have been a shock to a 12-year old child, this moment actually marked a turning point in my life when the school started to be much less stressful and I was finally able to cope with many of its challenges.

The period just before my referral and the diagnosis was particularly difficult, as my English teacher had put me through a series of 'discipline' measures, virtually turning my life into a nightmare.

Story one – Myra (full story)

Myra was a student in my History class. Like the rest of the class, she was 15 years old. I soon noticed that she was rather withdrawn and did not engage in class activities. At times, she would play out and express oppositional behaviour. Her performance in written and oral tests seemed significantly impeded by her lack of initiative.

At that time, we did not know that Myra had a functional ASD, so I resorted to a series of unsuccessful attempts to discipline and engage her. I still regret many of these decisions, which I'd made before finally making a referral for her to see the specialist.

I remember, my first reaction was to somehow impose socialising on her, to somehow make her socialise and collaborate with her peers. So, during a class visit to the local museum, I instructed two girls from Myra's class to stay close to her and engage her in dialogue and activities, not letting her to isolate herself from the general activity, as she would typically do. I expected that my 'secret plan' would eventually produce good results and make her mingle with the rest of the class.

However, exactly the opposite happened. She became more irritable and completely shut off, so that her classmates soon took on an attitude of sheer rudeness and judgement and simply excluded her from their company.

But even before that, I decided to punish her with a poor grade in the museum project, thinking that it would motivate her to try harder. I was wrong, as her behaviour became even more intolerable and her performance in tests was

significantly below average.

My next move was to impose additional reading activity, so I arranged with Myra's head teacher that instead the elective Art classes which she enjoyed, she would have to stay in the classroom for additional History reading. This radical measure did not have any positive effect either, as the only obvious result was her increased oppositional behaviour.

Eventually, I decided to be patient and started to speak with Myra in more depth. I realised that her uneven performance in different subjects had a deeper root than I initially thought. Having talked to her mother, I decided to make a referral for Myra to see a specialist, whereupon she was diagnosed with ASD.

Later on, we managed to find ways of her proper engagement in the class activities and her performance in school significantly improved.

Story two – Emma (full story)

My name is Emma and when I was twelve, I was diagnosed with ADHD. Even though you may think that the diagnosis must have been a shock to a 12-year old child, this moment actually marked a turning point in my life when the school started to be much less stressful and I was finally able to cope with many of its challenges.

The period just before my referral and the diagnosis was particularly difficult,

as my English teacher had put me through a series of 'discipline' measures, virtually turning my life into a nightmare.

Reading long texts was difficult for me, and it had been like that ever since grade one. I found it difficult to focus and I tried to avoid reading tasks, especially in English. On the other side, my speaking skill was above average, so my English teacher probably thought I was lazy and undisciplined, and for quite a long time she kept ignoring my outbursts of loose discipline, when I would be bothering my classmates or asking for a permission to leave the classroom.

After some time, my teacher made a sort of deal with me, allowing me to leave the classroom to 'cool off' for a couple of minutes, on an agreement that I would return and remain quiet, allowing the others to do their work.

This did not work either, plus the other children in the class began to openly protest against my privileged status.

My performance was suffering all the time and my outbursts of uncontrolled anger had become more and more frequent. What the teacher did next was of course to embarrass me in front of the class, probably thinking that it would make me go back to 'normal'. But the fact is that all the time I had been struggling with my own emotions, feeling more and more detached from the school.

So the embarrassment only added insult to injury and I became even more intolerable in the class. Which in turn caused my exposure to some real discipline measures. I was soon told that instead of my favourite PE classes, I

would be staying in the classroom for additional reading comprehension practice. This routine did not help me perform better, and only added to my frustration.

My self-confidence was shattered as I was convinced that I would have either to repeat the year or change the school, none of which I really wanted to happen.

However, this is when my English teacher made the decisive step and engaged me in a truly meaningful conversation. I remember how she got me talking about my view of the things, how I felt and what were the things that I struggled with.

With the consent of my parents, she soon arranged for me to see a specialist, who diagnosed me with ADHD. In no time at all, my situation at school changed for the better, as I started receiving the much needed support.

What other strategies and measures did the two teachers use, apart from the ones listed above?

The three case studies in this activity – the stories of Marco, Emma and Myra present three different conditions of neurodiversity, as well as three different manifestations of these neurodiversities in the classroom. Use the words from the box to complete summary sentences for the three stories.

cognitive problems	emotional insecurity	dyslexic
behavioural issues	autistic	ADHD

1. Marco is a(n) _____ student whose neurodiversity is reflected in

2. Myra is a(n) _____ student whose neurodiversity is reflected in

3. Emma is a(n) _____ student whose neurodiversity is manifested in

Answers

1. Marco is a dyslexic student whose neurodiversity is reflected in cognitive problems.
2. Myra is a(n) autistic student whose neurodiversity is reflected in emotional insecurity.
3. Emma is an ADHD student whose neurodiversity is manifested in behavioural issues.

Note: neurodiversity is often made manifest in the classroom through behaviour, cognition and emotional expressions.

Part three: Think about your own practice

In the previous section, you read about some decisions that teachers might resort to when they have a classroom situation they cannot cope with. However well aligned with some standard practices and discipline procedures practised by schools, these decisions often fail to produce expected results when working with SEN children.

Think about your teaching situation and answer the following questions:

1. Make a checklist of the signs to look for that may indicate presence of undetected SEN in your classroom. Put these signs in the order of relevance in your teaching situation. Write 1-5.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Uneven performance by a student | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor socialisation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Messy homework | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance strategies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of motivation | |

2. Prioritise the sources of information that may help you recognise the signs of SEN in your teaching situation. Write 1-5.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation with colleagues | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor socialisation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Official records held by the expert SEN team in your school | <input type="checkbox"/> Conversation with the student in question |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parents | |

3. Look at some of the 'pitfalls' or possible mistakes that teachers and schools make with SEN students, then arrange them in order from the most relevant to the least relevant in your situation. Write 1-5.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extra homework | <input type="checkbox"/> Detention |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embarrassing the student in front of the class | <input type="checkbox"/> Penalising behaviour by giving bad marks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring the problem | |

4. Look at some of the 'triggers', i.e. activities, situations, etc. that provoke a student's reaction which may indicate the presence of SEN, then arrange them in the order from the most to the least relevant in your situation. Write 1-5.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homework overload | <input type="checkbox"/> Team work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Certain type of activity (reading long texts, for example) | <input type="checkbox"/> Criticising poor performance |



Video: ADHD Child vs Non-ADHD Child

This section deals with the highly important concept of neurodiversity in the classroom and how this concept is reflected on individual 'spiky profile' of every pupil.

The following task will also help you to develop your own activity which you can do for more effective inclusive teaching in your classroom situation.

To do this task, imagine once again that you are the teacher of Marco, the 9-year old boy from the previous activity. This time, some two months after Marco was diagnosed with dyslexia, you have made the following description of Marco's learning strengths and weaknesses:

Marco excels at:

Verbal expression, arts and crafts, as well as physical activities. He also likes team work in these areas and loves company of other children.

Marco struggles with:

Long reading tasks, writing tasks, mathematical calculations. You do not like his messy written homework either.

Use the above description to complete the grid with Marco's 'Spiky Profile' that you want to use for your reference:

Ability	Maths	Language	Arts & crafts	Sports & games	Team projects
Excellent					
Above average					
Average					
Below average					
Low					

Defining areas for expected inclusion of the SEN pupils

Now, using your 'spiky profile', make a list of areas (activities, subjects, projects ...) in which Marco can make a real contribution to the class:





Answers

A possible spiky profile grid may look like this:

Ability	Maths	Language	Arts & crafts	Sports & games	Team projects
Excellent					
Above average			★	★	★
Average		★			
Below average	★				
Low					

A possible list of areas where Marco can contribute to the class may look like this:

Marco can contribute to:

- Class projects
- Activities that include movement,
- Arts and crafts
- Sports

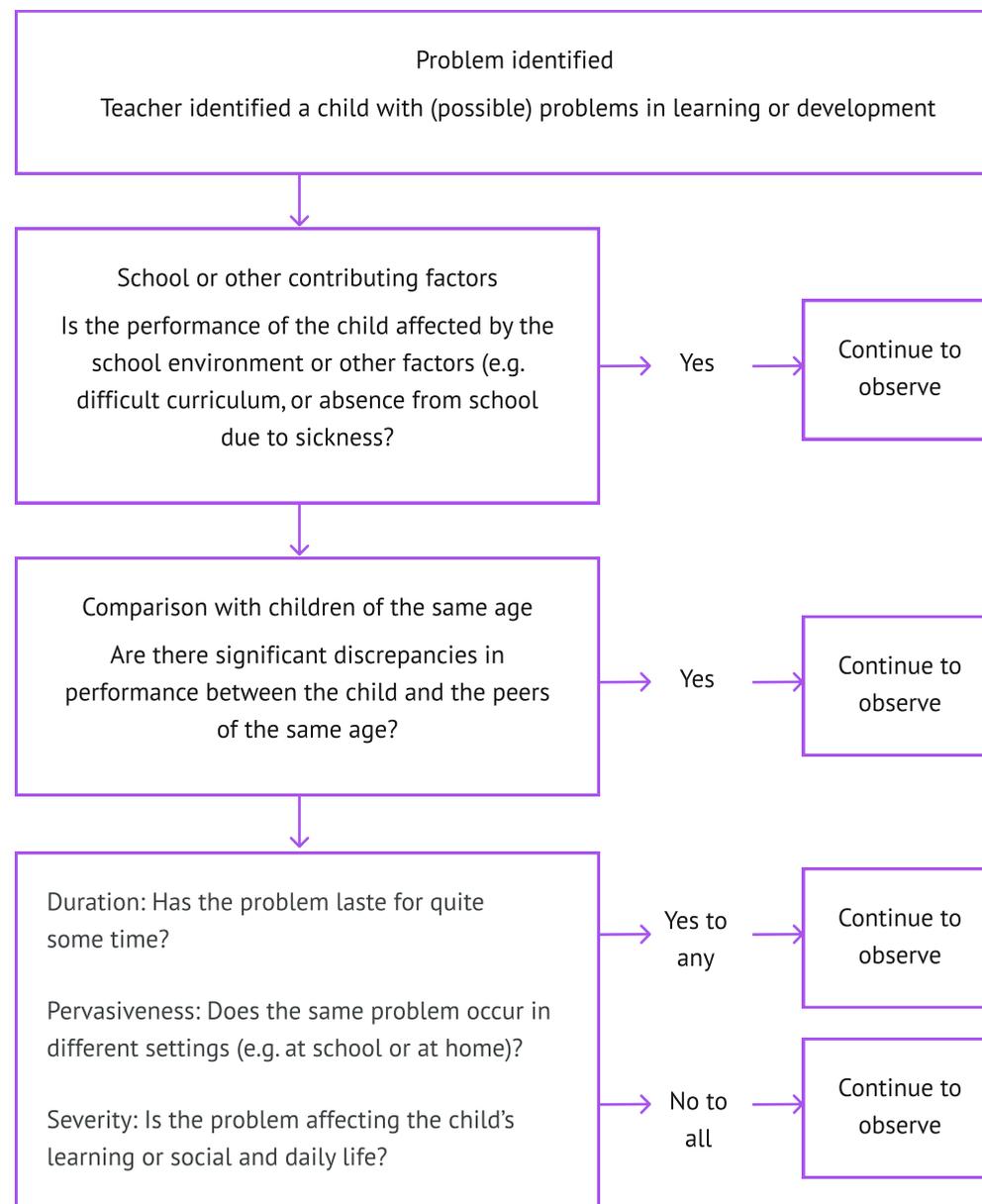


Five direct signs of SEN in the classroom

It can be difficult to identify possible signs of SEN in a student, so it's important to keep an eye out for any sorts of behaviour that you think should be investigated further. Use the following checklist to help you decide whether a student is demonstrating signs of SEN.

- School environment and other contributing factors: Ask yourself if the child's performance/ behaviour may be caused by the school environment or other factors (e.g. difficult curriculum, or absence from school due to sickness?)
- Comparison with peers: Are there significant discrepancies in performance between the child and the peers of the same age?
- Duration: Check if the problem has lasted for quite some time
- Pervasiveness: Does the same problem occur in different settings (e.g. at school or at home)?
- Severity: Is the problem affecting the child's learning or social and daily life?

It's important to note how this checklist can be used to help better detect SEN in your school or organisation. The diagram included below shows you how you could apply this checklist to your school or organisation.



Check your understanding

Take a short quiz to check you've understood the main points of the module.

Choose true or false.

1. Dyslexia is uncommon.

- a) True b) False

2. Dyslexia is reading and writing backwards.

- a) True b) False

3. People with autism are intellectually disabled.

- a) True b) False

4. People with autism cannot feel or express any emotion.

- a) True b) False

5. Children with ADHD just need to try harder to get better school grades.

- a) True b) False

6. All kids with ADHD are hyperactive.

- a) True b) False

7. Colour patterns in the classroom are important for autistic children.

- a) True b) False

8. Allowing an ADHD child to get up and leave his or her place during the class can be beneficial for the inclusive classroom.

- a) True b) False

Answers

1. The correct answer is 'false'. As many as 15 to 20 percent of kids could have dyslexia: when you detect possible signs, take them seriously.

2. The correct answer is 'false'. It is not that simple: lots of young children mix up letters, but kids with dyslexia have trouble learning and remembering the sounds of words.

3. The correct answer is 'false'. Many people with autism have normal to high iqs, and some may excel at math, music or another pursuit.

4. The correct answer is 'false'. Autistic people feel the same emotions you feel, they just communicate emotions and perceive your expressions in different ways.

5. The correct answer is 'false'. The reason why kids with adhd struggle with attention has nothing to do with attitude: it is to do with differences in the way their brain functions and how it is structured. Telling them to 'just focus' is like asking a nearsighted person to just see farther.

6. The correct answer is 'false'. Not all kids with adhd manifest hyperactivity, and for those who do, hyperactivity usually goes away or lessens as they get older

7. The correct answer is 'true'. Unexpected things can distract students with autism. using cool, calm colours in the classroom can help create a more relaxing atmosphere..

8. The correct answer is 'true'. Kids with adhd struggle with sitting still for a long period of time, so giving them a chance to get up and move around can be a big help.

Reflect on the module

In this final section, think about what you've learned this module and how you can use this in your day-to-day working life.

1. What is your biggest takeaway from this module about the detection of SEN signs in the classroom?

2. What do you commit to changing in your practice to timely detect possible signs of neurodiversity in your students?

3. What do you understand about how undetected SEN may manifest itself through cognitive, behavioural, emotional and other indications in your teaching situation?