



Literacy For All: Strategies for Pupils with SEND

A Practical Guide for SENDCOs and School Leaders

LexiaUK[®]
LITERACY FOR ALL

Introduction

Every child deserves the opportunity to become a confident reader, yet for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), literacy development can be an uphill struggle. SENDCOs and school leaders face the challenge of ensuring that these learners receive the personalised support they need, while also managing time constraints, curriculum demands, and the need for equitable learning opportunities across the classroom; all against the backdrop of an ongoing SEND crisis that puts additional strain on resources.

Effective literacy intervention for SEND learners is not just about addressing reading difficulties—it's about adopting an inclusive, structured approach that meets diverse needs and fosters long-term success. From dyslexia and ADHD to speech and language difficulties, SEND pupils require strategies that go beyond one-size-fits-all instruction, instead embracing adaptive, multisensory, and data-driven methods that enable progress at every level.

This guide explores practical, research-backed strategies to help educators create a more inclusive literacy environment. You'll discover:

- How to tailor literacy instruction for different SEN profiles
- The role of adaptive learning and technology in personalised intervention
- Best practices for data-informed decision-making and targeted support

By implementing these approaches, schools can help bridge the SEND attainment gap and ensure no learner is left behind. With the right strategy, schools can make meaningful progress toward achieving literacy for all.

Understanding SEND Literacy Needs

Learners with SEND face a diverse range of literacy challenges, each requiring a personalised approach to support their development. Some pupils may struggle with decoding, making it difficult to break words into sounds and recognise them automatically. Others experience language processing difficulties, which can affect their ability to understand spoken and written language, leading to struggles with vocabulary, sentence structure, and following instructions. Many learners with SEND also face reading comprehension barriers, making it challenging to extract meaning from texts, retain key information, or make connections between ideas. These difficulties don't just impact academic achievement—they can also affect confidence, self-esteem, and a student's willingness to engage with reading and writing tasks.

To provide meaningful literacy support, interventions must be adaptive, flexible, and responsive to individual needs. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, as pupils with SEND require tailored instruction that considers their strengths, challenges, and preferred learning styles. Effective teaching strategies include:

- 1** **Differentiation:** Adjusting tasks, materials, and expectations to provide the right level of challenge and support.
- 2** **Scaffolding:** Breaking down complex literacy tasks into smaller, manageable steps to build confidence and independence.
- 3** **Multisensory Learning:** Engaging multiple senses (sight, sound, touch, and movement) to reinforce reading and language skills in a way that suits diverse learning styles.

Alongside these strategies, pacing and resource selection are crucial—some learners may need more time to process new concepts, while others may benefit from digital tools and structured intervention programs that adapt to their progress. By integrating these principles, educators can create a literacy environment where every pupil receives the support they need to build strong, lasting reading skills.

Personalised Learning in Action: Strategies for SEND Success

Pacing and Progression: Finding the Right Speed

The speed at which learners progress through reading tasks significantly impacts their engagement and success. SEND pupils may need more time to process and apply new literacy skills, but overly slow pacing can lead to boredom or reduced motivation.

Striking the right balance involves:

- **Breaking tasks into manageable steps:** This helps learners gain confidence by mastering one skill at a time before progressing to the next, allowing them to experience success and build momentum.
- **Allowing opportunities for review and reinforcement:** Revisiting key concepts periodically helps ensure that learners understand and retain what they've learned, providing the reinforcement needed for long-term retention.
- **Regularly assessing progress:** By monitoring each learner's progress through assessments, educators can adjust the pace to match individual needs, preventing frustration or stagnation.
- **Incorporating movement and breaks:** Frequent, structured breaks allow learners to reset their focus, especially when engaging with more complex literacy skills or tasks that require sustained attention. A responsive approach to pacing ensures that each learner is appropriately challenged, enhancing engagement, persistence, and overall progress in literacy development.



Selecting the Right Resources: Engagement and Accessibility

The materials used in literacy intervention should not only match a learner's ability level but also engage and motivate them. SEND pupils often benefit from:

Appropriately challenging texts

Reading materials should be accessible to learners, but not so simple that they become disengaged. Well-chosen texts provide just the right amount of challenge to help students progress while avoiding frustration.

Multisensory learning tools

Combining visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic elements (such as audiobooks, highlighted text, or tactile letter tiles) helps to engage multiple senses, deepening comprehension and retention.

Interest-based reading materials

Offering texts related to a learner's personal interests encourages intrinsic motivation, helping to build a positive relationship with reading that can last a lifetime. Selecting the right resources can ensure that reading is not only accessible but also enjoyable, fostering a love of learning and encouraging continued literacy progress.

Scaffolding: Building Independence Through Support

Scaffolding ensures that SEND learners receive the guidance they need while gradually increasing their independence. Effective scaffolding strategies include:

- **Modelling** – Demonstrating reading strategies, such as decoding unfamiliar words or summarising a passage, before asking pupils to try independently.
- **Guided practice** – Encouraging learners to complete tasks with structured support, such as prompting comprehension questions or working through a passage together.
- **Gradual release of responsibility** – Reducing the level of support as the learner gains confidence and skills, moving from shared to independent reading tasks.

For example, when teaching comprehension, an educator might first read a text aloud and discuss key points with the class. Next, students might read a section together with guided support, followed by independent reading with comprehension questions. This step-by-step approach fosters confidence and skill mastery, ensuring that learners are well-prepared to tackle literacy challenges independently.

Data-Driven Intervention: Using Insights to Inform Teaching

In the pursuit of literacy for all, especially for pupils with SEND, data-driven intervention is essential to ensure that teaching methods are both effective and personalised. By leveraging formative assessment and real-time progress tracking, educators can continuously adjust their approach to meet the evolving needs of each pupil.

The Importance of Ongoing Assessment and Progress Tracking

Ongoing assessment is critical in identifying both the strengths and areas for improvement in the literacy skills of pupils with SEND. Unlike one-off testing or static evaluations, continuous assessments allow teachers to observe pupil progress in real time, enabling them to detect even subtle shifts in performance. This dynamic approach ensures that no pupil falls behind unnoticed.

Progress tracking is equally important, as it provides teachers with a clear overview of where each pupil stands in their learning journey. By regularly reviewing data on a pupil's performance, educators can track improvements, identify persistent gaps, and adjust their interventions accordingly. This regular feedback loop fosters a responsive, adaptive teaching environment where instructional strategies can be continuously refined.



How Real-Time Data Can Help SENDCOs Identify Gaps and Tailor Interventions

Real-time data offers invaluable insights into where each pupil needs targeted support. By analysing data from adaptive learning tools, SENDCOs can identify specific areas of difficulty, such as decoding, fluency, comprehension, or vocabulary. The real-time nature of this data allows SENDCOs to act quickly, deploying interventions that are directly aligned with a pupil's current needs rather than relying on outdated or generalised strategies.

For example, if a pupil struggles with decoding skills, the data can highlight patterns that indicate the need for phonics-based interventions. Conversely, if a pupil excels in phonics but shows signs of struggling with comprehension, interventions can shift towards strategies that focus on understanding text and building higher-level reading skills. With data in hand, SENDCOs can personalise their approach to create a more responsive and effective learning experience for every pupil.

Case Study: Meersbrook Bank Primary School

Meersbrook Bank Primary School's experience with Lexia exemplifies how data-driven intervention can significantly support literacy development for all students, including those with SEND. The program's ability to provide individualised, real-time learning experiences has made a remarkable impact on both the pupils' engagement and academic progress.

Implementing Lexia with pupils with SEND

The journey with Lexia at Meersbrook Bank Primary began when the school's SENDCO introduced the program. Initially, the school began with just a few licenses, testing the program with a small group of pupils who were receiving additional support. Quickly, the children using Lexia made notable progress, prompting the school to expand its use. The adaptive nature of Lexia meant it didn't just cater to struggling learners with SEND but also pushed higher-achieving students, including those identified as gifted and talented. The program's ability to meet pupils at their level and move them forward, regardless of their starting point, made it a valuable resource for the entire school community.

The Impact on Pupils

The impact of Lexia on pupils at Meersbrook Bank has been overwhelmingly positive. According to staff, pupils are enthusiastic about using the program, often asking to continue their lessons even when they don't have a scheduled session. Children who were previously disengaged with phonics and reading have shown dramatic improvements in their skills, with many becoming more confident in their abilities.

For instance, a group of Year 3 pupils who were struggling with phonics after leaving the phonics program have made significant progress with Lexia. The personalised approach has allowed them to accelerate through the levels and develop skills they had previously found challenging.

Using Reports to Track Progress

The myLexia reports have been an invaluable tool for tracking pupil progress and informing planning. Teachers use the reports to prepare for parent meetings, discuss individual learning needs, and set goals for students. For SEND pupils with Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs), Lexia data is included in their documentation, ensuring that progress is carefully monitored and communicated. The ability to track both in-school and home usage further supports the school's data-driven approach to intervention.

Conclusion

Meersbrook Bank Primary School's success with Lexia is a testament to the power of data-driven intervention. By using real-time progress tracking and adaptive learning technology, the school has been able to support all students, including those with SEND and those who are new to English, in achieving their full potential. The program has not only transformed the school's literacy teaching but has also helped foster a culture of excitement and motivation around learning.

Overcoming Common Barriers to Literacy Progress

Achieving literacy progress in all pupils, particularly those who struggle, requires a combination of strategies that address both the academic and emotional aspects of learning. It's important to recognise the specific barriers that might prevent students from reaching their full potential and implement targeted interventions to overcome these challenges.

Addressing Low Engagement and Motivation in Struggling Readers

Engagement is a crucial factor in fostering literacy progress, especially for struggling readers. Research consistently demonstrates that students who are actively engaged in their learning tend to achieve better academically. According to research by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris (2004), engagement is directly linked to motivation, and students who are motivated to learn are more likely to succeed. However, when students face challenges in reading, it can be easy for their engagement and motivation to wane. To address this, it is essential to understand what drives student motivation and how we can cultivate a learning environment that fosters sustained interest and effort.

What Drives Intrinsic Motivation?

Research by Deci et al. (1999) suggests that intrinsic motivation leads to higher levels of effort, satisfaction, and learning. This means that, when working with struggling readers, fostering intrinsic motivation is key. But how can educators inspire intrinsic motivation, particularly for those who may have become disengaged due to past challenges in reading?

Three primary factors drive intrinsic motivation in learners: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

- **Autonomy:** When students feel a sense of control over their learning, they are more likely to stay engaged. Offering opportunities for choice, whether it's selecting tasks or setting personal learning goals, allows students to feel empowered in their educational journey.
- **Competence:** Learners who feel capable and successful in their efforts are more likely to stay motivated. By providing appropriately challenging tasks and celebrating small successes, educators can build students' confidence and sense of accomplishment.
- **Relatedness:** Engagement is also driven by the need for social connection. When students feel that their learning is meaningful and supported by teachers and peers, they are more likely to remain motivated.

Strategies to Foster Engagement and Motivation

To foster engagement in struggling readers, it's important to incorporate strategies that appeal to these three key areas of intrinsic motivation.

Autonomy

Provide students with choices during lessons. Offering a range of activities and allowing them to select those that interest them helps them feel more in control of their learning. When students are given the chance to set goals and track their progress, they take ownership of their learning journey, leading to greater intrinsic motivation.

Competence

Struggling readers benefit from tasks that are appropriately challenging. It's important to assess each student's individual progress and adjust tasks to match their current skill level. Celebrating small wins, whether it's completing a task, reaching a milestone, or simply persevering through a challenging moment, reinforces their belief in their own ability. Public recognition, such as certificates or praise for effort, can further motivate students to stay engaged.

Relatedness

Building a sense of community in the classroom encourages students to stay engaged. Encourage peer sharing and collaboration, allowing students to discuss what they've learned, compare progress, and motivate each other. Creating a classroom environment where achievements are celebrated fosters a sense of camaraderie and shared success, further enhancing engagement.

Supporting Pupils with Additional Barriers

Many pupils face additional barriers that can hinder their literacy development, such as English as an Additional Language (EAL) or socio-economic challenges. For EAL learners, it's vital to offer consistent, focused support in both their language development and literacy skills. Lexia's adaptive learning system is particularly beneficial, as it can be tailored to each pupil's level and learning needs, helping EAL students build confidence in reading and language skills at their own pace.

Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds may have limited access to resources or learning support outside of school, making it even more important to ensure that they receive high-quality, differentiated teaching in the classroom.

Providing opportunities for independent learning through tools like Lexia, which can be accessed both at school and at home, ensures that these pupils have access to ongoing support. Collaboration with families, to encourage use of literacy programs outside of school hours, can make a significant difference to their progress.

Implementing Effective Literacy Interventions

Literacy interventions are most effective when they are structured, focused, and delivered consistently. Whether you are working with individuals or small groups, a well-planned intervention can make a profound impact on a pupil's literacy progress. Below are some best practices for implementing literacy interventions and using technology to support teacher-led efforts.

Effective intervention sessions are those that focus on the specific needs of each pupil. For struggling readers, this means starting with a diagnostic assessment to identify key areas of difficulty—such as phonemic awareness, fluency, or comprehension. Once areas for improvement have been identified, interventions should be targeted, frequent, and delivered in short, manageable blocks of time. Sessions should incorporate a blend of direct instruction, practice, and feedback, with a strong emphasis on pupil participation and engagement.

Intervention sessions should also provide opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in real-world contexts. Using texts that are meaningful and relevant to the pupil's interests can help build both confidence and motivation. The key to success is consistency—ensuring that pupils engage with literacy tasks regularly to reinforce and build upon their skills.

Small Group vs. One-to-One Support: When and How to Use Each Approach

Both small group and one-to-one interventions have their place in a comprehensive literacy strategy. One-to-one support is particularly valuable when a pupil requires intense, focused attention on a specific area of literacy, such as decoding or comprehension. This approach allows for personalised instruction and immediate feedback, which can be invaluable for struggling readers.

However, small group interventions can be equally effective, especially when there is a shared area of need, such as phonics or vocabulary development. Small groups foster peer interaction, allowing students to collaborate and learn from each other. Group sessions also help to build confidence and communication skills, as students engage in discussions and work together towards common goals. It's important to assess the individual needs of your pupils when determining which approach to take. In some cases, a combination of both one-to-one and small group sessions may be appropriate to address different aspects of a pupil's literacy development.



How Technology Can Complement and Enhance Teacher-Led Intervention

Technology plays an increasingly important role in supporting teacher-led interventions. Tools like Lexia provide personalised, adaptive learning that can complement and reinforce teacher instruction. By providing real-time data and progress tracking, technology helps teachers to make informed decisions about what to focus on during intervention sessions.

One of the greatest advantages of adaptive technology is its ability to scale and support larger groups of learners. In group intervention settings, technology can enhance the reach of instruction by enabling each student to work at their own pace while still receiving targeted support. With adaptive programs like Lexia, pupils can engage in individualised learning within a group setting, allowing the teacher to focus on facilitating group activities and providing enrichment or additional support where needed. This makes it easier to manage the size and reach of small group interventions, ensuring that every student receives the attention they need without reducing the effectiveness of the session.

Technology also provides additional opportunities for practice outside of school hours, reinforcing learning with instant feedback and personalised challenges. With programs that adapt to each learner's pace, students continue to progress independently, even when they are not in a face-to-face session with a teacher. This enhances the overall effectiveness of small group interventions by allowing pupils to work through difficult areas at their own speed, while the teacher can monitor progress and adjust as needed.

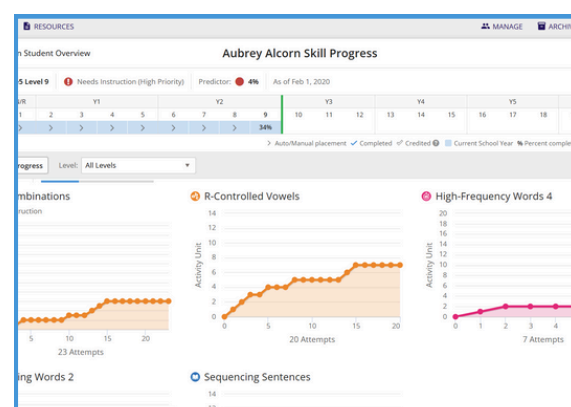
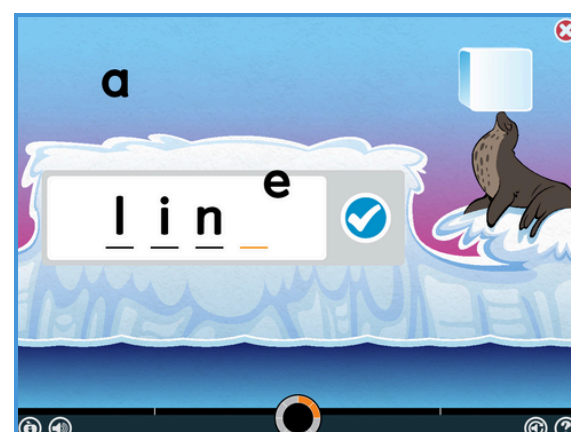
Incorporating technology into literacy interventions also frees up time for teachers to focus on providing high-quality, individualised support where it's most needed. By blending traditional methods with innovative digital tools, schools can create a well-rounded literacy intervention strategy that supports all learners, regardless of their starting point. Technology expands the capacity of small group instruction, allowing for greater reach and impact, especially in resource-constrained environments.



The Role of Lexia Core5 Reading in Supporting Literacy Development in Pupils with SEND

Lexia Core5 Reading is designed to offer a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to literacy instruction, tailored to the needs of all learners, including those with SEND. The program aligns with current research on effective literacy strategies, ensuring that pupils are taught key skills in a structured, sequenced way. Through its personalised learning pathways, Lexia Core5 adapts to each child's individual needs, providing targeted support and challenging them at the right level. This flexible approach ensures that learners with a range of abilities can make consistent progress, regardless of where they start.

A key benefit of Lexia Core5 is its ability to provide real-time data on each pupil's performance, enabling teachers to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and adjust instruction as needed. This not only reduces the administrative burden for educators but also streamlines intervention planning, allowing them to focus on what matters most—supporting pupil growth. The real-time insights generated by Core5 empower schools to provide timely, responsive interventions that directly address the unique needs of their students, particularly those with SEND, ensuring that every pupil has the opportunity to thrive.



Next Steps: Bringing These Strategies into Your School

For SENDCOs and school leadership teams, integrating a structured literacy strategy is key to supporting literacy progress for all students. The first step is to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are at the heart of your literacy plans. By adopting evidence-based approaches, like those provided by LexiaUK, schools can ensure that every pupil has access to high-quality, adaptive literacy instruction. A whole-school strategy focused on early identification, personalised learning pathways, and continuous progress monitoring is essential for creating a truly inclusive literacy environment.

To implement these strategies, start by providing staff with the training and resources needed to confidently use the tools available, such as Lexia Core5 Reading. Set clear goals for literacy progress across the school and ensure regular monitoring through data insights to track improvement. Additionally, encourage collaboration between staff, parents, and support teams to ensure consistent and sustained progress.

If you are ready to take the next step in transforming literacy support at your school, we invite you to explore Lexia Core5 Reading further. We offer a free consultation and 30-day trial of the full programme to help you assess how Lexia can be integrated into your current curriculum and support the diverse needs of your students. Contact us today to schedule a consultation and discover how Lexia can help your school achieve Literacy for All.

Request a Consultation



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