



### DID YOU KNOW?

10% of the British public are dyslexic; 4% severely so. You can find out more information specifically for schools at [bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://bdadyslexia.org.uk).

# Independence DAYS

Investing in technology is perhaps the single most important thing you can do to help your SEN students achieve on their own terms, says Sal McKeown...

**M**airead is in year 10. She has dyslexia but is not getting much help at home. There are several children in the family so her mum is often too tired to help Mairead with her homework. She gets lots of support at school. In fact, in some lessons she has an LSA almost glued to her side, to make notes for her and keep her on task. Partly this is because Mairead gets very frustrated and will disrupt the class given half a chance.

Mairead is eligible for free school meals and is one of the pupils targeted by the Pupil Premium. This is ring-fenced additional funding to help schools support their disadvantaged pupils and close the attainment gap between them and their peers. The Pupil Premium is rising to £1.875 billion in 2013-14, with schools attracting £900 per disadvantaged child.

Most schools have pupils like Mairead, who with a bit of a boost could get quite good grades in examinations. With the Pupil Premium a school might choose to implement a SEAL programme (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) or invest in working with Mairead's mum or pay for more time with an LSA. But if they have any sense, they will certainly also consider investing money in technology to make Mairead more independent and prepare her for future life in a workplace, where she will have to manage without individual support.

A toolkit for schools developed by the Education Endowment Foundation shows the cost and effectiveness of different interventions on a 4-point scale. For example, peer tutoring, a cheap intervention, brought

about an improvement of 6 months. Technology is more expensive, but brought about an improvement of 4 months.

By contrast, ability grouping caused a deterioration of one month and the use of teaching assistants brought about no improvement at all in pupil performance. A report from The Institute of Education in 2009 went further: 'At secondary level the more contact pupils had with support staff the less individual attention they had from teachers. There was a consistent negative relationship between the amount of support a pupil received and the progress they made in English and mathematics.' This is no great surprise. Pupils such as Mairead can easily become over-reliant on others and do not develop the confidence or 'self-regulation' to take ownership of their learning.

Technology in my view is invaluable. It offers four key benefits: to assess, to remediate, to provide access to the curriculum and, for some learners, to provide equal opportunities in examinations.

The New Ofsted framework means schools must show the issues they have identified and the efficacy of interventions. A good MIS (Management Information System) system will do this quickly and efficiently. Drills and skills software will help learners who need targeted support and offers instant feedback, constant availability and total privacy.

Technology must give learners access to the curriculum. This is not just access to the VLE or to schemes of work but to materials

## +CASE STUDY

Belvoir High School in Leicestershire is using CapturaTalk for Android, an assistive technology application that lets users take a picture and convert it into digital text using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology and hear it read back aloud. They found that CapturaTalk enhanced research. Learners could listen to a web page, copy and edit the text and use it as the basis for extended writing. The predictive text feature within the Android operating system was a feature that they were already familiar with from their own mobile phones.

Belvoir School teachers have prepared work on their interactive whiteboard and photographed it using the built-in camera on the tablet. The Optical Character Recognition (OCR) feature of CapturaTalk converted the picture into plain text so the children could then complete their work independently, which increased their confidence and developed their self-esteem.



that work for different learning styles: animations to explain scientific processes; Skype for hearing and speaking a language; videos for those who cannot form pictures in their head from words; wikis for sharing and refining ideas with a class group. Blogs let them interact with learners across the world, while audio means text can be read aloud by a computer and saved as an MP3 to be played back via a mobile phone so they can listen to it on the bus or at home.

If these examples were not argument enough for making more use of technology, consider the changes to examinations. There is to be a reduction in coursework and more emphasis on written tests. This will disadvantage many special needs students who have problems with their thought processing speed, reading and writing. However, awarding bodies for qualifications have to comply with the duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make 'reasonable adjustments' for students with disabilities.'

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has announced that from this summer, if a student would normally use technology in their lessons, for homework and for formal assessments in schools he or she will be able to use it for an exam:

*"Where the centre has approval for the use of a scribe and where it reflects the candidate's normal way of working within the centre, as appropriate to his/her needs, the candidate may alternatively use ... voice activated computer software which produces hard copy with predictive text when the candidate dictates into a word processor. Software (a screen reader) may be used to read back and correct the candidate's dictated answers."*

This means that candidates can use software such as Dragon NaturallySpeaking, Texthelp's Read and Write Gold ([texthelp.com/UK](http://texthelp.com/UK)) or ClaroRead to read the exam paper or dictate their answers. This could prove very popular with headteachers as it will save time and money if they do not have to provide a reader, scribe or separate invigilator.

Mark McClusker, Chair of the British Assistive Technology Association (BATA) and CEO of software company Texthelp, says "This is a positive for everyone, for teachers, pupils and examination boards. In Kentucky when they introduced text reading software into exams, they found the pupils preferred it to a human reader. They could keep replaying the text but would have felt awkward asking a human being to read the same passage again and again. Text readers are consistent and patient."

The danger is that teachers – that it is seen as a Senco's problem or for computer support staff or the head of ICT. When it comes to pupils with special needs, whether they are high incidence needs such as dyslexia or severe low incidence needs such as cerebral palsy, all staff need to be involved. Nasen launched the Every Teacher campaign in 2012, which states very clearly that 'Every teacher is responsible and accountable for every pupil in their class.' This means that teachers have to teach all pupils and not set some aside to be looked after by a LSA. They also need to look at the ICT needs of pupils.

"The use of ICT will support differentiated learning as well as monitor and assess a pupil's progress," comments Lorraine Petersen, Chief Executive of nasen. "It will also support those with poor communication skills and will give them 'a voice' within the classroom."

## INFO BAR

### USEFUL LINKS

EDUCATION ENDOWMENT  
FOUNDATION –  
[TINYURL.COM/TICTEEF](http://TINYURL.COM/TICTEEF)  
JOINT COUNCIL FOR  
QUALIFICATIONS (JCQ) –  
[TINYURL.COM/TICTJCO](http://TINYURL.COM/TICTJCO)  
NASEN – [NASEN.ORG.UK](http://NASEN.ORG.UK)



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SAL MCKEOWN IS A  
FREELANCE SPECIAL NEEDS  
JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR  
OF BRILLIANT IDEAS FOR  
USING ICT IN THE  
INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM  
(ROUTLEDGE) AND A BOOK  
FOR PARENTS, HOW TO  
HELP YOUR DYSLEXIC AND  
DYSPRAXIC CHILD  
(CRIMSON PUBLISHING).

