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Cognition and learning introduction

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Children and young people with cognition and learning difficulties will find it hard to keep up in most, or all, of the academic areas of the curriculum. They are likely to face challenges with developing basic literacy or numeracy skills and may find listening, paying sustained attention and comprehending difficult. Many pupils will also struggle with both long- and short-term memory.

A pupil with cognitive difficulties may also have problems with gross motor skills, such as throwing a ball, and fine motor skills, such as holding a pencil or cutting with scissors. Some may also have poor organisational skills. If pupils become frustrated with their learning because of these challenges, they may start to use avoidance techniques or demonstrate restless or disruptive behaviour. Pupils with cognitive difficulties are unlikely to progress as quickly as their peers, and there will be a tendency for any gaps in attainment to widen as pupils get older.

‘Learning difficulties cover a wide range of needs, including Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD), Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), where children are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum and associated difficulties with mobility and communication, through to Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), where children are likely to have severe and complex learning difficulties as well as a physical disability or sensory impairment. Specific learning difficulties (SpLD), affect one or more specific aspects of learning. This encompasses a range of conditions such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia.’ (SEND Code of Practice 2015, paragraphs 6.30 & 6.31)

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