

Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD)

Moderate Learning Difficulties

A child or young person with greater difficulties than the majority of their age, in making progress across all areas of the curriculum despite effective teaching, which is not due to factors such as:

- Learning English as an Additional Language. (EAL)
- Socioeconomic.
- Sensory Impairment.
- Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).

The children and young people may present with difficulties in understanding, thinking, problem solving and retaining information, concepts and skills as well as difficulties in:

- Attention and listening.
- Concentration and on task behaviour.
- Literacy and numeracy skills.
- Language development.
- Self-organisation.
- Making links between different areas of learning and generalising to everyday experience.
- Visual, practical and spatial/physical learning.

Leicester City Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Support Service's approach to Moderate Learning Difficulties

The local authority's expectation is that the vast majority of needs will be met within a mainstream school. The Early Years Support Team (EYST) and the Learning, Communication and Interaction Team (LCI) work with the City Psychology Service (CPS) as part of Leicester's SEND Support Service to offer assessment, advice, training and support to families, settings and schools to meet the SEND of children and young people with MLD. [Electronic referrals to the SEND Support Service](#) are discussed at fortnightly intervals and, if accepted, allocated to the appropriate Team. The allocated Team will then contact the referrer and family/setting/school to discuss the nature of the support needed. This support can range from direct work with the child or young person, to advice and support to parents/carers and/or practitioners, to delivering training to individual parents or groups of parents or practitioners. Teams may also liaise with other professionals involved with the child or young person to gain a fuller picture of the child's needs and the support required. Training can be arranged centrally (i.e., at a venue arranged by the SEND Support Service) or can be delivered to individual or groups of parents/carers, settings or schools. Training is delivered either virtually or face-to-face.

People and services for children and young people with MLD

Role and expectations of the school:

Senior management team & SENCO should:

- Have a good understanding of MLD to help teachers to identify MLD through the graduated responses in their school.

Teachers and TAs should:

- Plan and develop differentiated lesson planning/delivery modified in terms of:
 - level (i.e., focusing on key learning outcomes and drawing on earlier programmes of study as appropriate with learning targets broken down into smaller achievable steps).
 - pace (i.e., extra time for responses to questions, contributing to class discussions and to complete activities).
 - approach (i.e., multi-sensory, related to the child's everyday experience, emphasis on direct experience and practical activities including use of ICT).
 - output (i.e., alternative ways to record learning, e.g., oral, photographic, video, highlighting text, mind maps, etc.).
- cue and reinforce children's listening/attention.
- check understanding and reinforcing as needed through repetition, rephrasing, explaining and demonstration.
- demonstrate tasks which will also show what the finished product looks like.
- plan for opportunities for pre-teaching, overlearning and reinforcement.
- explicitly teach the generalisation of skills, including those which have been acquired in withdrawal groups.
- use visual cues to support understanding including the use of objects, pictures, signs, symbols, models, examples and IT.
- model and teach study skills (e.g., having a plan to complete the task, problem solving skills, etc.).
- support the development of personal organisation e.g., using resources, organising equipment, etc.
- have a good understanding of what MLD is and strategies to support these learners.
- know the pupil well and listen to their concerns. This will include noticing needs and difficulties early and using checklists and identification tools.
- identify strengths and weaknesses and use this information to plan support.
- access inhouse training around the early identification of MLD needs.
- use resources and learning strategies recommended by the SENCO or Local Authority Specialist Teaching teams.
- liaise closely with other staff who may run withdrawal interventions with the children and young people and ensure that this is part of the Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle.
- utilise alternative assessment methods as appropriate.

Role and expectations of the local authority

SEND Support Service should:

- work with appropriate outside agencies e.g., LCI and CPS.
- support schools to ensure that MLD is appropriately identified (currently within Leicester City MLD is over identified and SLCN is underrepresented).

Provisions and practice for children and young people with MLD

Role and expectations of the school

Schools should:

- have clear procedures for a graduated response.
- ensure that pupils' progress and targets for all curriculum areas are closely monitored and evaluated termly. Make continual adjustments to support provision as part of the cycle of 'assess, plan, do, review'.
- ensure High Quality Teaching which will include activities being well organised, differentiated, structured, planned and engaging.
- ensure that self-esteem needs of the children and young people are addressed as an integral part of interventions.
- ensure that there is a holistic understanding of the children and young people needs and that this is reflected in their learning programme.
- consider and plan for relationship development and opportunities for collaborative learning e.g., partnership work and group work.
- allow children to have different and/or supported arrangements e.g., moving around the school, visual timetables, sensory breaks.
- consider the extent to which homework adds or detracts from the learning experience. If provided, all homework must be suitably differentiated.
- provide support for new and less experienced staff members within school.
- implement early identification policies – including EAL.
- use peer support, where appropriate.
- ensure effective transitions for all children and young people. This will include between lessons and/or interventions, breaks and lunchtimes start and end of school day, as well as at the end of year and mid-year transitions such as moving to and from a new school.
- consider any arrangements which will be needed to allow for testing and examinations. This may include options around alternative qualifications.

Role and expectations of the local authority

SEND support services should:

- advise on whole school strategies and approaches of support for children and young people with MLD.
- provide specific advice for pupils.
- signpost to and recommend evidence-based interventions for learners.
- provide specific advice for children and young people to understand their learning differences.

Environment for children and young people with MLD

Role and expectations of the school

Schools should:

- Ensure that the physical environment of both individual classroom and the wider school environment are well organised, tidy and clutter-free with clear signposting to different areas of the school.
- Ensure the school has a communication friendly environment e.g., signs and symbols are used throughout school as well as written labels. This should include working walls, word banks and visual prompts on display within the classroom/ intervention spaces. Older learners may have individual versions to move around the school.
- Promote a stress-free environment i.e., positive and trusting relationships, a suitable level of challenge and sensory differences accommodated.
- Ensure the physical environment of the school is inclusive and is reflective of the achievements (academic and non-academic) of all.
- Ensure there are distraction free areas for learning e.g., individual workstations, small rooms.

Role and expectations of the local authority

SEND support services should:

- provide advice and guidance on whole school strategies and approaches:
 - in making the environment more inclusive.
 - to support the children and young people specifically around the environment.

Resources for learning for children and young people with MLD

Role and expectations of the school

For children and young people with MLD, schools should:

- ensure visual systems are in place, used consistently and personalised according to the individual child or young person's needs. These may include:
 - Attention pictures, e.g., good listening/sitting.
 - Individual mats or cushions etc. to indicate where the child or young person needs to sit.
 - Timers to indicate how long the child or young person needs to focus.
 - Whole class and personalised visual timetables.
 - First-then boards.
 - Choice boards.
 - Personalised reward system.
 - Objects of reference.
 - Task planners.
 - Mind maps or concept / topic maps.
 - Writing frames or story maps.
 - Number lines.
 - Emotion fans.
 - 5-point scale or zones of regulation'
 - Concrete apparatus.
 - Word webs.

- organise time for explicit teaching of how the child or young person could use these resources.
- provide support to encourage and develop children and young people's independence in using and applying strategies and resources.
- provide support to help children and young people organise their learning e.g., provide a homework diary/schedule.
- provide IT (Information Technology) aids and specific programmes to facilitate access to the curriculum e.g., an iPad, laptop, Clicker, Widgit, Hairy Letters, Makaton, as part of reasonable adjustments.

Role and expectations of the local authority

SEND support services should:

- regularly update best practice guidance and make it accessible to school e.g., through the extranet, SENCO briefings and newsletters.
- encourage and facilitate the sharing of best practice including areas of expertise.
- signpost to relevant resources to support learning including assistive technologies.
- signpost families to learning resources e.g., online, library, other organisations.
- maintain a transparent and fair process of allocating Top-up funding where needed.