

How the condition impacts education and learning varies, depending on the student's profile. This makes planning to support learners difficult but rewarding

HOW LEARNING IS AFFECTED

FASD is brain-based

FASD alters the way that the brain is structured and how neural pathways are linked. In the classroom the very essence of what we do is all about the brain and developing the neural pathways to draw down on what our students learn. Being affected by FASD can be a considerable barrier to learning, because the affected brain works in a different way. It does not have to be a barrier because it is not that those affected cannot learn but rather that they learn in a different way to their peers.

Although we do not have hard and fast prevalence figures indications are that 6% of the population may be affected to some degree. Teachers and everyone working in education most likely has already met and worked with more than one person whose learning has been affected by FASD. Educators were probably at school with some as well.

Experience shows that students achieve most when trusted adults in their schools interpret and reimagine the educational journey that the child is on. Making learning accessible for them, by setting small manageable steps and recognising that their pupil may well stumble meant that they were able to achieve.

TWO KEY MESSAGES

Core points

1. Children with FASD are different to any other type of pupil that you will come across, and
2. Young people with FASD can and do achieve.

Their learning environment and the lesson plans you use must be adapted to meet their individual needs. The adults in the school need to strive to build strong working relationships so that they understand their affected pupil(s).

Only by understanding their pupils, what they can do and what they find difficult can adults in schools make the reasonable adjustments necessary for a student to achieve. These adjustments often are not huge, but the rewards can be great.

MANAGE CHANGE

Consistency

Those affected pupils and students will crave a clear and consistent approach and if this is achieved, they will be able to cope with in classrooms. Consistency is important as affected children often struggle with change or new experiences. However, new experiences are vital in developing learning. This means that change needs to be carefully managed. Students need time and space to reach their own conclusions and learn.

RETHINK EXPECTATIONS

Be prepared to repeat key learning and over teach subjects. Your expectations of what they can do and how they can do it will be the key to success. You may have to change your expectation of that young person. This is not making excuses or accepting second best, but rather tailoring how you think to optimise what they do. The way that you manage learning and behaviour with alter as well and the student will achieve more.

A student with FASD likely will be at a developmental or learning level roughly half their chronological age. Of course, it is not quite as simple as that.

There may not be a noticeable difference at nursery but in Key Stage 4 the difference may be apparent. Differences may be noticed at key transition stages in a school career. Even if a student that you teach does not achieve the same expected level as their peers this does not mean that they won't achieve. It takes longer than expected but the neural networks that learning builds can be constructed. Sadly, in too many cases the learning journey ceases with the statutory age for education, but with the child functioning at a much lower educational level.

LISTEN TO THE PARENTS

Behaviours may well be different at home and at school and this can be confusing. Sometimes it can almost seem that the parent or carer is describing a different child, but this is a real situation. At home, a child may struggle with learning situations that aren't apparent in school. Parents may appear anxious themselves seeking interventions that are not as clear in your setting. They too need your understanding and support.

INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT

EHCP needs assessments are important: For many of these reasons many affected children may not register for assessment for an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) until a large issue suddenly appears. Be proactive. Developing an appropriate individual educational plan, which might include an EHCP is essential to provide the additional space, time, and resources that a young person needs.

A good plan will also inform everyone who meets the affected young person about the best approaches to take. In a large secondary it is important that the consistency discussed before is carried across the whole team of adults in the school if the child is going to achieve their potential.

Reasonable adjustments are a right, even without an EHCP. As Dr Raja Mukherjee says, "It's not about fixing the individual, it's about facilitating them to perform optimally." In the classroom, by creating the right learning environment that allows students affected by FASD to perform at their optimum you can and will change their lives for the better.

RESOURCES

FASD in Focus: Education, National Organisation for FASD.

FASD in Focus: Characteristics by Age, National Organisation for FASD.

Teaching a Student with FASD, National Organisation for FASD.

Understanding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD): What Educators need to know, Ayrshire and Arran NHS.

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By Brian Roberts, Field of Enterprise Consulting, <https://www.fieldofenterprise.org>

Brian is a former virtual school head and trained teacher.

www.NationalFASD.org.uk • info@nofas-uk.org

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