

# More information on the LEANS project and neurodiversity

Supplement to the LEANS presentation at the SE19 Joint SEND Strategic Conversation meeting, October 12th 2022

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## **Document contents:**

[What is the LEANS project?](#)

[LEANS information online](#)

[General neurodiversity readings for professionals](#)

[Academic papers on neurodivergent young people--health and outcomes](#)

## What is the LEANS project?

LEANS is a free, downloadable programme for mainstream primary schools. It introduces pupils aged 8-11 to the concept of *neurodiversity*, and help them explore how it impacts school experiences. It is a teacher-delivered resource for the whole class.

LEANS is guided by three big goals: **know-think-do**. The aim is for participating pupils and staff to...

**LEANS**   
Learning About Neurodiversity at School



**KNOW:** Increase their **knowledge** of neurodiversity terms and concepts.

**THINK:** Develop more positive **attitudes** towards neurodiversity and neurodivergence.

**DO:** Increase individuals' positive and inclusive **actions** within the school community.

LEANS combines different types of materials across the curriculum. A small number of **explainer videos** introduce tricky new vocabulary and concepts, in child-friendly language.

Each unit includes pupil **activities**. These are hands-on explorations of neurodiversity ideas, usually combined with class discussion or reflective elements. Activities are integrated with the **LEANS stories** about a fictional, neurodiverse classroom of pupils, who are also doing a LEANS-like programme. The purpose of the stories is to show how the bigger-picture neurodiversity concepts impact people's lives. The story characters represent a range of experiences, strengths, and challenges, and different diagnostic statuses (neurodivergent, differences but no diagnosis, and neurotypical).

## LEANS information online

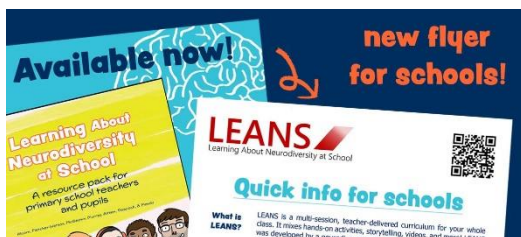
The LEANS project website is the **main source of information** about the LEANS programme, and the only place to download it (free worldwide). If you aren't looking to download the entire pack, there's plenty of summary information available on the site. You can also find out how we developed LEANS, and who was involved.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/salvesen-research/leans>

### Please join our mailing list!

The list is our main way to share project news, such as events, updates/new resource items, publications, and participation opportunities. It is for educators, families, researchers, and anyone interested in the LEANS project.

Add your e-mail here: [https://edinburgh.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0PLduvb6qRjSQNE](https://edinburgh.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0PLduvb6qRjSQNE)



### Download our quick info sheet for schools right here!

This colourful A4 flyer has some basic LEANS info targeted at schools, but isn't a comprehensive fact sheet—it encourages interested people to visit the website for all the details.

[https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/leans\\_flyer\\_for\\_schools\\_-\\_august\\_2022.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/leans_flyer_for_schools_-_august_2022.pdf)

### Looking for a quick introduction to LEANS?

Try our recent online articles on the National Autistic Society website or in nasen magazine:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/neurodiversity-schools>

<https://nasen.org.uk/resources/nasen-connect-magazine-july-2022>

For a slightly more detailed overview, please watch the recording of our **June 14<sup>th</sup> public launch events**. In it, you'll also hear from educators involved in creating LEANS.

<https://youtu.be/p6of6izsK94> (91 minutes)

# General neurodiversity readings for professionals

With thanks to LEANS team member Fergus Murray for compiling this list of recommendations. It is excerpted from the LEANS Teacher Handbook, and is also available as a downloadable document from the LEANS website:

[https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/leans\\_recommended\\_neurodiversity\\_readings\\_for\\_educators.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/leans_recommended_neurodiversity_readings_for_educators.pdf)

## 1) New to neurodiversity? Try these sources

You may find it useful to look at these resources in the order they are listed.

### 1. Autistic Mutual Aide Society Edinburgh (AMASE) Glossary

*Online resource*

A concise guide to some basic vocabulary useful for talking and reading about neurodiversity.

<https://amase.org.uk/glossary/>

### 2. Neurodiversity is for Everyone

*Article*

Why neurodiversity is an important idea for everyone to understand, and how it relates to disability and diversity more broadly.

<https://oolong.medium.com/neurodiversity-is-for-everyone-f375a27aa3c9>

### 3. Understanding neurodiversity in the context of equality and inclusive practice

*Guidance document for professionals*

A professional guide for teachers from the General Teaching Council for Scotland, who also have useful guides to autism and dyslexia.

Information about the GTCS guides: <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/News/news/gtcs-publishes-asl-professional-guides.aspx>

Direct link to the neurodiversity guide:

<https://www.gtcs.org.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?!ID=8838&sID=11411>

### 4. What is Neurodiversity and what should schools be doing?

*Article*

A TES article giving one writer's view of what neurodiversity should mean for schools.

<https://www.tes.com/news/what-is-neurodiversity>

### 5. A Different Sort of Normal

*Book*

Primarily aimed at kids, this is an engaging and easy to read guide to neurodiversity, as well as an account of the author's experiences growing up as an autistic girl (but only realising that later). This could be particularly helpful when it comes to discussing neurodiversity with kids.

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/443103/a-different-sort-of-normal/9780241508794.html>

## 2) Have experience with neurodiversity, or want more detail?

### 1. Neurodiversity: some basic terms and definitions

*Online resource/article*

A more in-depth exploration of the language of neurodiversity.

<https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/>

### 2. Clearing up some misconceptions about neurodiversity

*Blog/ online magazine article*

Neurodiversity is often misrepresented and misunderstood; this important Scientific American Magazine piece tackles some of the myths head-on.

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/clearing-up-some-misconceptions-about-neurodiversity/>

### 3. The Different Minds podcast

*Podcast series*

The broadcaster John Offord discusses neurodiversity-related topics with a wide range of guests in this podcast. Start with Judy Singer, credited with coining the term, or Siena Castellon, founder of Neurodiversity Celebration Week.

<https://anchor.fm/differentminds>

*Suggested episodes:*

<https://anchor.fm/differentminds/episodes/In-conversation-with-Judy-Singer---creator-of-the-term-Neurodiversity-eiadof>

<https://anchor.fm/differentminds/episodes/Neurodiversity--the-new-normal-ehIng1>

### 4. The Neurodiversity Reader

*Edited book*

A scholarly but largely accessible collection of texts exploring key ideas about neurodiversity, both in theory and in practice.

<https://www.pavpub.com/mental-health/the-neurodiversity-reader>

## Reading list references

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## Academic papers on neurodivergent young people—health and outcomes

*Excerpted from the LEANS teacher handbook. During today's presentation, this is the type of content I referred to regarding neurodivergent children and young people as a group who may have poorer outcomes compared to typically developing groups.*

Social media and the news consistently draw our attention to stories of children in these groups who are struggling with school, or experiencing a pattern of negative life events as they mature and try to navigate the world. **Academic research strongly indicates that these are not sad exceptions, but part of widespread patterns.** Based on research, pupils with learning difficulties experience a range of negative outcomes including bullying [1], poor mental health [2-3] and school exclusion [4]. These experiences necessarily prevent them from thriving in education [5]. It is evident that harmful stereotypes and lack of understanding play a key role in these disadvantages. For example, there is a growing

evidence base indicating that people with learning differences are poorly understood [6-8] including by themselves [9], and this has been related directly to poor mental health outcomes including suicidality [10]. In autism, for example, we know that people are often judged harshly on minimal evidence by non-autistic raters [11] including by children [12].

**The news is not all bad: there is *also* a strong evidence base that we can fight stigma by increasing people's knowledge [e.g. 13]. This has also been shown specifically in schools, even over a short period [14].**

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