The Learning About Neurodiversity at School (LEANS) programme:

a short introduction for schools

LEANS
Learning About Neurodiversity at School

Salvesen Mindroom Centre
No Mind Left Behind

www.ed.ac.uk/salvesen-research/leans

Introducing LEANS

Learning About Neurodiversity in Schools (LEANS) is a free curriculum for mainstream primary schools to introduce children aged 8-11 years to the concept of neurodiversity. It has been developed by a neurodiverse team of experienced researchers and educators, led by the Salvesen Mindroom Research Centre at the University of Edinburgh, in partnership with Salvesen Mindroom Centre.

This programme introduces the concept of neurodiversity to children, and how it is relevant to their own schools and lives. 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 vary in format and may include games, problem-solving tasks, or art. Each unit begins with a Unit summary for teachers, giving an overall description of the unit and what pupils will do and discuss.

LEANS is divided into seven units which cover:

- **Unit 1:** Introduction to neurodiversity
- **Unit 2:** Learning and thinking differently
- **Unit 3:** Communication and understanding
- **Unit 4:** Getting along together at school
- **Unit 5:** Is that fair?
- **Unit 6:** Different ways to make a friendship
- **Unit 7:** Neurodiversity in our classroom

The teacher handbook and downloadable resource pack provide all that is needed for class teachers to get up to speed on neurodiversity, and to prepare and deliver LEANS in the classroom. You don't need any certification or to attend a training course in order to deliver LEANS, but we do recommend taking the time to read the handbook in full and prepare thoroughly.

Why deliver LEANS in your school?

Young people with additional support and educational needs can thrive if they receive the right support and understanding at school. However, they too-often experience a range of negative outcomes such as bullying and mental ill health. According to research, harmful stereotypes and poor understanding from others play contributing roles in these disadvantages. It can be hard to know how to combat these problems. LEANS is not an anti-bullying intervention, but it has the potential to create a more tolerant ethos among the students in your class.

Neurodiversity concepts and vocabulary are useful tools in everyday school interactions. These can help us explain why things are the way they are or making sense of what we (and others) are doing. It can help us reflect on diverse personal experiences of school settings, learning, and relationships (for example through videos or fiction).

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

KNOW:

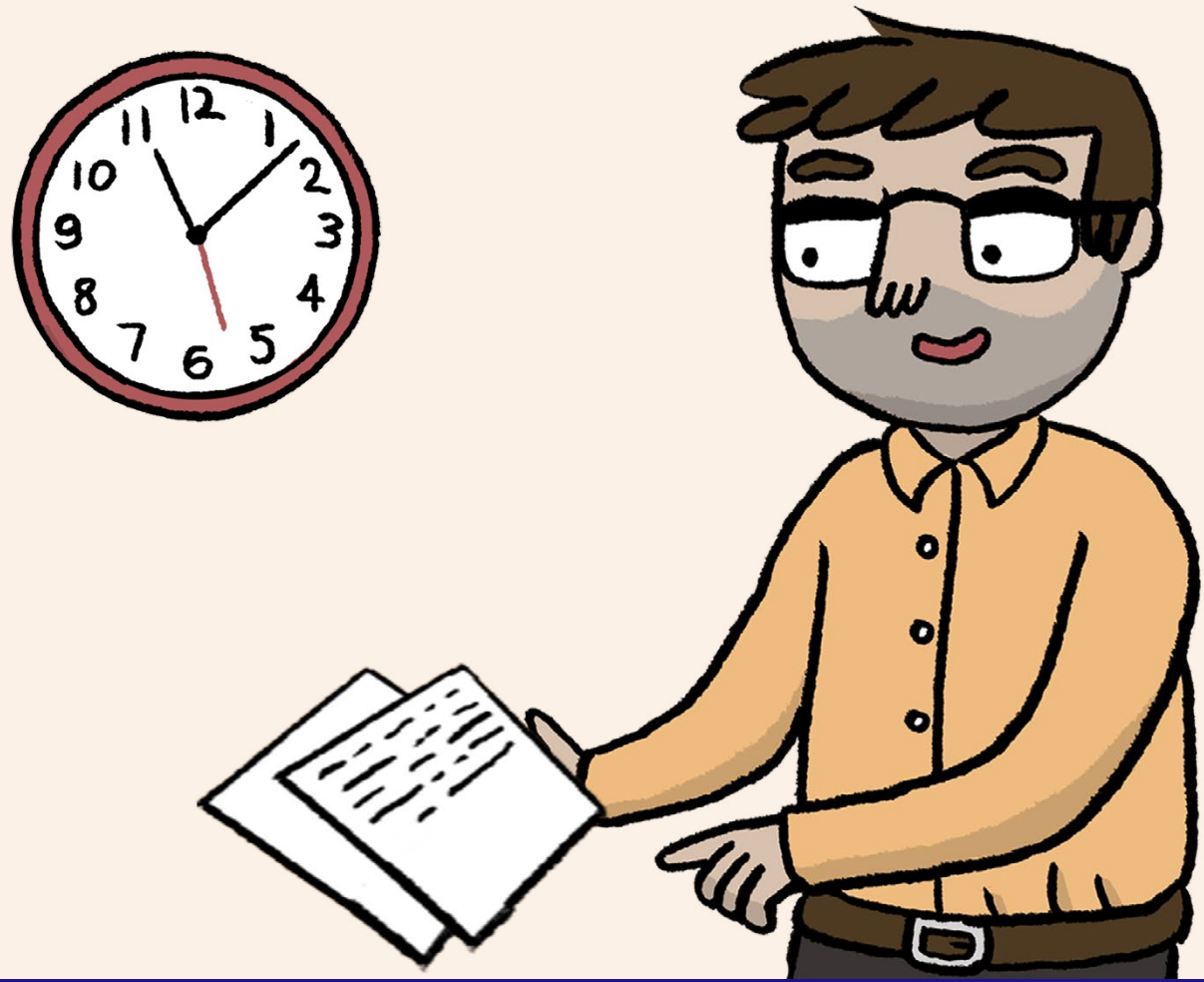
Increase their **knowledge** of neurodiversity terms and concepts.

THINK:

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

DO:

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



LEANS and neurodiversity can be linked to existing school curriculum and to support quality indicators in school. For example, neurodiversity links to topic-based learning like citizenship, or health and wellbeing. Learning about neurodiversity can also help with skills development, such as encouraging pupils to think about what makes them effective learners, and to practise self-advocacy skills in asking for help. The activities and the very concept of neurodiversity should also align with fundamental principles and core purposes of our education system, like inclusion, human rights and the UNCRC, and in Scotland, the GIRFEC and the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators.

Further information

Are you now ready to learn more and take LEANS into your classrooms?

You can find the full LEANS resource pack on the LEANS website, along with more information about LEANS: https://www.ed.ac.uk/salvesen-research/leans

1 This resource has been produced to introduce LEANS to schools in Scotland. It can be adapted for use in other jurisdictions.