The Little Book of Dyslexia
Joe Beech
Independent Thinking Press (2013)
Review by Claire Burgess

The Little Book of Dyslexia is sub-headed ‘Both sides of the classroom’, which frames the way this book has been written. The author is a trainee teacher who himself was diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of eight, and the book merges the dual perspectives of someone who experienced the education system with dyslexia and who is also preparing to educate others. Its stated audience is teachers but also students and parents, and in fact anyone who works/lives with someone who has dyslexia is likely to find some use from reading this book.

Joe Beech uses an open, almost chatty style in his writing which makes the book a very accessible read. The chapters have a natural progression through explaining what dyslexia is, to giving advice on how to best support dyslexic pupils through the different stages of school, to discussions on the use of technology, exams and teaching. It is therefore suitable as a dip-in-dip-out book but also a comprehensive read from start to end (and as it is a ‘Little Book’ as the title suggests, at 150 small pages you can do this practically in one sitting). He relies heavily on his own experience but that is a positive element of this book, as it gives the impression of him speaking from a position of knowledge and understanding, rather than someone who is solely reliant on research (he notably uses a substantial amount of research to back up his intuitions).

The opening chapters are enlightening with regard to myth-busting about dyslexia – for example that dyslexia is not a sign of being less able, and actually many people with dyslexia demonstrate high IQs (backed up at the end of the book by a celebration of many famous and successful people with dyslexia, including Richard Branson and Bill Gates). He gives a thought-provoking fact that ‘more than 50 per cent of NASA employees are dyslexic, hired for their superior problem-solving and spatial awareness skills’. His stance is that dyslexic pupils need support to demonstrate what they can do rather than being labelled as having ‘learning difficulties’. Beech states that as 10 per cent of the population have signs of dyslexia, there is a strong likelihood of a teacher having a dyslexic student in the classroom. He highlights that many remain undiagnosed, and weaves throughout the chapters signs to look out for in your pupils/children (not just ‘poor spellers/readers’ as the stereotype).

Alongside the information about the facts and signs of dyslexia, the book is crammed full of helpful hints and tips to support pupils with dyslexia. At the end of each school-focused chapter he gives ‘ACBs’ (Assessment, Classroom practice, Behaviour) which are practical suggestions to draw on to support and manage these pupils. His criticisms of the education system, both from his experiences as a pupil and now as a trainee teacher, are stark, but he makes them from the viewpoint of someone trying to work with the system and get the best from it, not change it (or be resigned to conformity). He discusses barriers such as focusing on weaknesses in dyslexic children, and emphasis on written work and handwriting, and gives suggestions on how to think around these. His chapter on technology is particularly useful, giving examples of software that has worked for him as a pupil and teacher (with an excellent ‘planning flow chart’ in place of a traditional lesson plan).

As an ex-teacher, I found this book refreshing and enlightening, with the focus on getting to know your dyslexic pupils and listening to them, treating them as individuals rather than ‘one size fits all’ (and also rather than assuming their support needs to come from the SENCO). Some of Beech’s advice in the later stages of the book, around exam techniques and Higher Education, could arguably apply to any student, but it is still useful advice. I would recommend this book for both teachers and parents as a way of viewing dyslexia through a different lens, and as an inspirational source of ideas to support children with dyslexia to crash through the barriers that the education system can often put in the way of them demonstrating their potential.