Wrong way round

By **Fay Burstin**

PARENTS' high hopes for a successful education accompany every tiny prep pupil who walks through the school gates for the first time this week.

But for every child who goes on to top their class, enter university and forge successful careers, just as many will discover learning difficulties that could hold them back.

One of the most prevalent is dyslexia, believed to affect up to one in 10 children.

Dyslexia, commonly known as the back-to-front spelling disability, is almost certainly hereditary and genes on at least eight different chromosomes have been linked to the condition.

But a recent study found dyslexia could turn out to be a route to riches.

British psychology researchers found self-made millionaires were four times more likely to suffer from dyslexia than the rest of the population.

And 40 per cent of the 300 successful businessmen and women studied had been diagnosed with the learning difficulty, performed badly at school and still did poorly in aptitude tests.

But while they tended not to be good at details, dyslexics learned to excel by grasping the bigger picture and producing original ideas.

Study leader and British business psychologist Dr Adrian Atkinson said many also were more motivated because of the social exclusion they felt.

"Most people who make a million have difficult childhoods or have been frustrated in a major way and dyslexia is one of the driving forces behind that," he said.

Celebrity chef and dyslexic Jamie Oliver, *pictured*, has revealed he records all the recipes for his books on a dictaphone because of his difficulties reading and writing.

One type of dyslexia is more common in boys than girls and is believed to be caused by an excess of testosterone during pregnancy.

FAMOUS DYSLEXICS

Jamie Oliver — TV chef

Richard Branson — entrepreneur

Cher — pop star, actor

Tom Cruise — actor

Noel Gallagher — Oasis rock group

Whoopi Goldberg — actor

But studies on twins show that other factors including environment, experiences, education and upbringing have just as significant an impact as genes and that whatever genetic influence exists probably comes from a combination of factors.

Dyslexia Australia spokeswoman Brenda Baird explained dyslexia was not a disease or the result of a brain injury or defect.

Dyslexic people thought primarily in pictures not words and had difficulty learning to work with symbols such as letters or numerals, she said.

When confused or frustrated as children, they experienced distorted perceptions, such as reversals of letters, and developed life-long learning blocks that hampered their progress.

"We're picture-thinkers," said Baird, a dyslexic whose husband and son suffered the same problem.

But they overcame their difficulties with a revolutionary learning method she now teaches. Developed in the 1980s by American Ron Davis, a dyslexic who taught himself to read and write at 38, the Davis Dyslexia Correction Method claimed a 97 per cent success rate.

Baird said: "The dyslexic person is given the ability to focus and create a word using clay. For example, the word 'she' is taught by getting them to mould images of the letters S, H and E and the meaning in the figure of a woman or girl. My husband, who was illiterate until the age of 17, passed his driver's test within six months of learning the method."

HOW TO RECOGNISE DYSLEXIA SYMPTOMS

- A noticeable difference between the pupil's ability and their actual achievement.
- Family history of learning difficulties.
- Difficulties with spelling.
- Confusion over left and right.
- Writing letters or numbers backwards.
- Problems with maths.
- Problems organising themselves.
- Having trouble following two or three-step instructions.