

What works in dyslexia / SpLD friendly practice in the secondary school and further education college sectors:

Four case studies of effective practice

Researched by the Faculty of Education,
Manchester Metropolitan University.

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Executive summary

Background to the study

These case studies were researched and produced by a team from the Faculty of Education at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), in partnership with the British Dyslexia Association (BDA). They are part of the second year of a major Department for Education (DfE) funded project, aiming to develop the quality and effectiveness of support for students with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties (SpLD) in English schools and further education (FE) colleges.

The first year of the project built a nationwide series of one-day training events for primary schools, secondary schools and colleges, which were designed around a 'train the trainer' model, where each school or college sent representatives to the training events and then subsequently 'cascaded' the training back to staff at their own institutions. Our research team at MMU were tasked with evaluating the impact of this training project, see the Final Evaluation Report at:

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/TtTevaluation2017.pdf

Overall, the project was a success, although attendance figures revealed lower participation from secondary schools and colleges than from the primary sector. Discussion about the possible reasons for this noted how busy secondary and FE staff usually are and that this might have explained the reluctance of these institutions to release staff to attend the training.

For this reason, it was decided that there might be a case for facilitating easier access for secondary and FE staff and their senior management teams (SMTs) to examples of best practice in supporting dyslexia-friendly practice at whole-school and classroom levels.

The resulting series of case studies, presented here, are drawn mainly from the secondary and FE sectors, and can be used as models for other schools to develop their own dyslexia-friendly cultures, policies and practices.


This second phase of the project will also see the development, by our research team at MMU, of two scoping literature reviews of recent research: the first, a review of the literature on the effectiveness of dyslexia-friendly classroom and whole-school approaches; the second, on research into processes for change in inclusive practice and evidence for success in enabling achievement.

Developing the Case Studies

The first task was to identify the schools and colleges that could be used as these exemplars of good practice. It was decided that these schools and colleges would need to have demonstrated proven success in dyslexia-friendly practice, so we selected only institutions that had already achieved a dyslexia-friendly Quality Mark, which is awarded only after a process of audit, action planning and rigorous inspection.

We selected four institutions that met these criteria, two in the North West of England and two in the South East. The first is [Wellacre Academy](#), a mainstream, non-selective secondary school for boys in Trafford, Greater Manchester. The second is [Blackpool Sixth Form College](#), an FE college in Blackpool, Lancashire. The third, [St Luke's School](#), is a co-educational local authority-maintained special school, catering for 9-19 year olds, near St Albans in Hertfordshire. The fourth is [Frewen College](#), an independent co-educational special school, catering for 7-19 year olds, near Rye in Sussex. The rationale for choosing two special schools / colleges was that the good practice in those settings could easily be transferred to mainstream settings, allowing us to share strong examples of best practice.

Our research team members carried out one-day visits to each of the institutions selected, having gained permissions to interview members of the senior management teams (SMTs), teaching staff, parents and students identified as dyslexic. We also carried out two 30-minute lesson observations in each institution in a range of different curriculum subject areas and collected images of the classroom layouts, displays, teaching resources, which have been reproduced in each case study report. Where interviewees have granted permission for their names to appear in the case studies, full names are given; otherwise, initials only are provided.



Having analysed our interview and observational data we presented these findings in each case study report under five main headings:

1. Background to the Case Study
2. Leadership and Management
3. Teaching and Learning
4. Students' and Parents' Views
5. Conclusions

Our key findings about the elements that have contributed to these schools' and colleges' success in achieving dyslexia-friendly awards are summarised below.

Summary of Findings

Leadership and Management

The key role that SMTs can play in achieving dyslexia-friendly cultures, policies and practices are as follows:

- a recognition of the need to develop dyslexia-friendly practice at whole-school / college level;
- the identification of a key staff member with specialist knowledge to lead the dyslexia-friendly school / college project;
- the assembling of a small team of committed staff to organise the roll-out of the project;
- accessing support and advice from relevant outside agencies (e.g. local authority advisory staff);
- the carrying out of a thorough audit of current practice in the school / college with regard to supporting students with dyslexia;
- the use of these data to develop a project Action Plan, with clear targets, responsible staff, timelines and review dates;
- an understanding of the need for 'buy-in' to the project from teaching staff;
- offering opportunities for short-term gains for staff (e.g. making small changes to practice, leading to more success in engaging dyslexic students with learning) and longer-term gains (e.g. developing a sense of professional competence and confidence, as well as satisfaction in seeing improvements in the achievement and attainment of dyslexic students);
- a programme of training in dyslexia awareness and in developing dyslexia-friendly practice in the classroom, with extra mentoring and support for less confident members of the teaching staff;
- a commitment to involve parents from the start of the project, through clear communications about the project, as well as opportunities for parents to access training;

- a commitment to maintaining the gains of the project through:
 - a. further training opportunities;
 - b. use of peer support amongst teachers;
 - c. recruitment of staff who are committed to or open to developing their dyslexia-friendly practice;
 - d. the building of dyslexia-friendly practice into teacher annual professional development reviews;
 - e. the monitoring of dyslexia-friendly practice through learning walks.

Developing Dyslexia-friendly Teaching and Learning

Through interviews with teaching staff and through lesson observations, our research team identified the following features as being key in developing dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning:

- access to training about the nature of dyslexia and how to support students with dyslexia in the classroom;
- access to ongoing advice and support from a mentor with specialist knowledge, including team teaching opportunities;
- access to peer support through peer observation and through sharing examples of dyslexia-friendly strategies and resources;
- a commitment to using multisensory techniques and resources in teaching and learning across the curriculum;
- use of ICT, including iPads and apps, to enhance teaching and learning across the curriculum;
- opportunities for students to use alternative recording strategies to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding (e.g. using mind maps, audio recording, role play, etc.);
- a consistent school / college-wide approach to developing study skills;
- linked to this, a fostering of students' metacognition about their own learning habits;
- supporting weaker working memory in dyslexic students (e.g. in use of pictures to support verbal instructions);

- fostering student feedback on their learning tasks;
- supporting dyslexic students' sequencing and organisational skills (e.g. breaking down tasks into smaller sequences of steps);
- consideration of the use of text in teaching: minimising overload, considering text layout, supporting text with pictures;
- support with extended writing tasks (e.g. use of writing frames, sentence starters, etc);
- use of the classroom's physical environment as a teaching and learning tool (e.g. the development of 'learning walls');
- extensive use of group work to foster cooperative learning (e.g. use of Kagan sets activities);
- maintaining an awareness of the emotional climate in the classroom and support for students to recognise and manage their emotional states.

Perhaps more radically, some of the schools had made changes at whole curriculum level to what they feel is a more dyslexia-friendly approach, including:

- a theme / topic-based approach to teaching the curriculum, where a unified topic becomes a vehicle for covering work from different subject areas;
- linked to this, the designing of 'inter-subject' lessons (e.g. Geography, Maths and German in a German-themed 'café' lesson).

Students' and Parents' Views

In each school and college, we were able to conduct paired interviews with students and individual interviews with parents. These stakeholders were all aware of, and very positive about, the dyslexia-friendly Quality Mark projects.

Students' views

The students that we interviewed reported the following as being important features of a dyslexia-friendly school / college experience:

- knowing how to access support (including individual support) for their literacy difficulties;
- accessing support for their learning across the curriculum at a learning support base;
- opportunities to discuss their work;
- teaching staff to go over work again;
- chance to develop better understanding of themselves as learners;
- tuition in study skills, including examination techniques;
- teaching staff breaking down tasks into small steps;
- use of visuals to support memory and organisational skills;
- opportunities to use audio recording to support memory;
- support in structuring assignments (e.g. story maps, writing frames, etc);
- putting work on coloured paper;
- dimming classroom electronic whiteboards;
- homework details glued into diaries, rather than copied from the board;
- teaching / learning resources available on the school / college's virtual leaning environment;
- chances to pursue their passions and interests at school / college;
- having quiet spaces to chill out at break times;
- not being made to feel different.

Parents' views

Parents gave the following as important issues for them as stakeholders at a dyslexia-friendly school / college:

- being involved in the dyslexia-friendly Quality Mark project from the outset;
- getting access to dyslexia awareness training as part of the project;
- being kept abreast of the project's developments;
- opportunities to network with other parents of students with dyslexia;
- getting advice on resources and techniques to support their children at home;
- good channels of communication that are two-way, so that parents' voices are heard;
- regular opportunities to discuss their child's progress with teaching staff;
- knowing that their child's teachers have some understanding of dyslexia and how to support their children in class;
- seeing their children's literacy skills improve;
- seeing the school's / college's recognition of their child's strengths and talents;
- seeing the school nurturing their child's confidence and self-esteem.

Conclusions

These case studies demonstrate that developing a dyslexia-friendly school or college is a very possible project to undertake. It needs the full backing of the SMT; a dedicated leader who can develop a feasible and timed budgeted action plan; and consideration of teacher 'buy-in' and support for all members of the teaching staff to develop their practice. Further, it needs parental involvement from the start and a strategy for maintenance, so as not to be merely swamped by other initiatives. Finally, it needs belief in all stakeholders that the project goals are achievable and do not involve vast expense, rocket science or knowledge of secret 'magic spells'. It is also an understanding that developing dyslexia-friendly practice is likely to benefit all learners, not just those students identified as dyslexic.

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The background image shows a classroom setting. A female teacher with dark hair, wearing a white shirt, is leaning over a desk, looking at a laptop screen. Two male students in white shirts and blue ties are sitting at the desk, looking at the laptop. Another female student in a white shirt and blue tie is sitting at a desk in the background, writing in a notebook. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent white box containing the title text. There are green decorative elements: a solid green rectangle on the left, a green circle on the bottom left, and a green pattern of white circles on the bottom right.

Case Study 1

Wellacre Academy

1. Background to the Case Study

Wellacre Academy is a mainstream high school for boys 11-16 years old, situated in Trafford Borough on the outskirts of Greater Manchester. Wellacre has 666 boys on the school roll with 74 students on the Special Educational Needs Register and 26% of students in receipt of the Pupil Premium.

In September 2017, it achieved the **Trafford Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark** and its dyslexia-friendly good practice was recently the subject of a news feature on BBC Radio Manchester.

Our team at Manchester Metropolitan University decided to aim to capture what Wellacre were doing through interviews with the school's Senior Management Team (SMT), teaching staff, students identified as having dyslexia, and with parents of students with dyslexia. We also conducted short (30 minute) observations of two lessons at Wellacre: a Year 8 Music class and a Year 11 English class. In these sessions, we also captured some of the good practice through digital photographs of the resources being used.

We gathered our data over the course of a one-day visit by one of our research teams, a day coordinated very efficiently, at the Wellacre end, by their Specialist Teaching Assistant (TA), Louisa Tunney.

2. Leadership and Management

We interviewed two members of the SMT: Head Teacher, Mel Wicks (who herself identifies as having dyslexia), and Special Needs Coordinator (SENCo), Michelle Critchlow.

When asked about what had inspired the decision to go for the Dyslexia-Friendly Schools Award, Mel explained that the school had noticed many students as having reading difficulties that seemed hard to address, despite good teaching. She also noted that, as well as having some students with a clear diagnosis of dyslexia, there were many more students at the school displaying 'dyslexic traits' in their learning profiles.

On top of this, Mel, Michelle and the SMT had noticed that many of Wellacre's feeder primary schools had already achieved dyslexia-friendly status. This meant that a transition to a secondary school that might not be as dyslexia-friendly might make the transition from primary to secondary school for students with dyslexia even more challenging: as Mel noted "We took our cue off the primaries..."

Therefore, in 2013, Wellacre decided to engage with the challenge of becoming a dyslexia-friendly school and achieving the Trafford Dyslexia-Friendly Quality Mark.

To facilitate this project, they drew upon support and advice from Trafford's Specialist Dyslexia Advisor, Julia Brown, who is also an assessor for the award.

Step 1: The school **established a Core Team** to drive the project forward. This team consisted of SENCo, Michelle Critchlow; Specialist TA, Louisa Tunney; two Heads of Faculty: Leor Holtsman (English) and Ms O'Neill (Humanities).

Step 2 was to undertake an **audit of current practice** at the school. Although this initial audit provided some pleasant surprises in revealing good practice, such as some use of multisensory teaching, the SMT realised that there was still considerable development work to do around the school.

Step 3 was to **pilot Action Plans** in two school faculties: English and Humanities. This involved **further detailed audits of practice** in those faculties, from which **Faculty Action Plans** were developed.

Step 4 was to **review the 2013-14 Faculty Action Plans**. From these reviews the Core Team were able to identify effective dyslexia-friendly resources and techniques. From this information and discussion with staff, the Core Team established what Michelle calls "the non-negotiables of dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning for staff lesson planning". This includes guidance to trainee teachers on teaching practice placements at Wellacre.

Step 5, in 2015, was to move on to roll out the dyslexia-friendly teaching project across the whole school at Wellacre. This consisted of **representatives of each school faculty and department attending training on dyslexia-friendly teaching**, organised and led by the Core Team, and then cascading that training back to their own faculty and departmental staff.

The Core Team helped **monitor and support** this whole-school roll-out through **lesson observations**, **learning walks** and offering **‘buddy’ mentoring** for some teachers who felt less confident in developing their dyslexia-friendly practice. Staff also had **dyslexia-friendly teaching targets** built into their individual annual Professional Development Reviews. Michelle also noted some cross-fertilisation of good practice:

“I think some peer pressure comes into play; that they walk around the school and they start looking at ‘Oh my God, look at the English displays, look at the wonderful Science cupboards’...”

The project also benefitted from impetus given through **links with other SMT strategic improvement targets**. As Michelle explained:

“We have been really lucky to work with two Assistant Principals: Teaching and Learning and CPD [Continuing Professional Development] that have both got on board with it, ‘cos that isn’t my discrete area of responsibility, so it’s good that they got on board. We went from calling it Good Teaching and Learning to Quality First Teaching, taking it from the SEN Code of Practice. Our CPD is now around action research...”

There is an **Action Research Group** amongst the staff at Wellacre who can focus upon a small group of students in a class over a year, using the government’s 2014 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice’s **‘Assess, Plan, Do, Review’** cycle. Some of the teachers are looking to do their action research around dyslexia-friendly teaching and Michelle plans to **use their findings as a showcase to inspire other staff**.

So, to summarise the SMT’s involvement in the dyslexia-friendly school project at Wellacre, they have:

- **recognised the need** for developing dyslexia-friendly practice as a whole school improvement issue;
- established a **Core Team** to develop the project who:
 - **audited current practice** at the school;
 - **piloted the project** in two faculties;
 - **established core ‘non-negotiables’** in dyslexia-friendly lesson planning and teaching;
 - **rolled out** the dyslexia-friendly practice project **throughout the school**;
 - **cascaded training** to all faculties and departments as part of this roll-out;

- **continually monitored and supported the dyslexia-friendly school project**, in particular, mentoring less confident teachers;
- sought to **link the dyslexia-friendly project to other related strategic school improvement goals** in Teaching and Learning and in Continuous Professional Development, including small-scale action research projects, focussing upon dyslexia-friendly practice, which can then be showcased and shared with other staff.

3. Developing Dyslexia-Friendly Teaching and Learning at Wellacre

To find out more about dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning at Wellacre we conducted interviews with two teachers: Leor Holtsman, a member of the project Core Team and Key Stage 3 leader of English, and Sylvie Crossley, an English teacher. We also conducted short (30 minute) observations of lessons: a Year 11 English class and a Year 9 Music class.

In this section, we have also drawn further upon the interviews with Head Teacher, Mel and SENCo, Michelle.

Mel had pointed out earlier that, because she and some of the other teaching staff had dyslexia, she felt that this might give them a unique insight into students' learning needs.

There was some truth in this, though Leor pointed out that that was only part of the issue:

“I found out that I had dyslexia when I was doing my final dissertation for a university degree... It didn't get recognised at school. I knew I had problems writing extensive responses and essays... but nothing got detected at school and there was nothing in place at school to support dyslexia... so I had a bit of understanding of what dyslexia was, but from a teaching perspective, I didn't know what I needed to do as a strategy, but the training showed me about breaking down texts, chunking it up.”

The core message of the training within school was to encourage staff to teach the children as if they all had dyslexia. As Leor noted:

“I think it was about trying to make ourselves more inclusive, 'cos it benefitted all students, regardless of ability and need... and it was offering ways of making teaching more interesting.”

To support her training and to offer models of good practice, Michelle had developed **a file of examples of Quality First Teaching** to help inspire staff to adapt these to their own departmental needs and to be used as a basis for developing their own dyslexia-friendly teaching resources. This was mentioned by Leor and Sylvia to be a really useful resource, especially when cascading the training. The pack consists of various ideas for differentiation and examples of supportive resources for teaching, such as writing frames (see the example in Figure 1 below).

Worked example – Storytelling learning resource







Beginning – setting			Middle – What happened?			End
Where?	Who?	Where?	Kick off	Response	Result	Feelings
						

Figure 1: a sample writing frame, from the school's Quality First Teaching File.

Michelle's training focussed upon several areas of dyslexia-friendly practice:

Area 1: To begin with, teachers were encouraged to make small **changes in their classroom environments**, such as using **coloured paper for worksheets**, using **off-white / colour background fills for the interactive whiteboards** and **labelling resource cupboards and drawers** in their classrooms.

Area 2: Aimed to encourage teachers to make small **changes to teaching resources and practices**. These might include **using a larger font**, and taking **care with the layout of text** on worksheets and on whiteboard presentations to **avoid cluttered 'text overload'**. Instruction lists would **use numbering** (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) rather than just bullet points, to make them easier to refer back to for dyslexic students, and **each instruction could be accompanied by an image**. **Writing frames** were adopted more widely and **sentence starters** were provided for more reluctant writers. As Sylvia noted:

"It's about starting them off so they don't have a blank page, which is a fear for a lot of the students."

Finally, **word-mats** could be provided for students with **key subject vocabulary in lessons**, to offer support for spelling.

Area 3: Aimed at encouraging teachers to **be aware of the working memory difficulties of students with dyslexia** and many other students with SEN. Therefore, teachers were encouraged to **avoid activities such as dictations** and to **limit the amount of copying from a wall-mounted screen**. Sylvia **prints off her power-point presentations** in lessons so that dyslexic students have a complete record of the lesson, rather than getting lost when she moves between slides. Teachers were encouraged to **break down tasks into sections** and **not to overload verbal instructions**. Questions to students would also **allow more student mental processing time**.

Area 4: Was to encourage teachers to understand that **dyslexic learners thrive in a cooperative learning environment**, so they were encouraged to experiment with **use of Kagan structures in group work: group problem-solving**, and **peer assessment**, an approach considered very appropriate to supporting learners with dyslexia, according to dyslexia expert, Neil Mackay.

We had a chance to see these principles in action in two lesson observations during our visit to Wellacre.

Year 9 Music

Firstly, we visited a mixed-ability Year 9 music class being taught by music teacher, Sally Spencer. The lesson was focussed upon students working in pairs, working on **three graded short keyboard pieces** (a ‘**must, should, could**’ progression, in terms of differentiation), rehearsing it and then playing it to be **appraised by their partner** (a Kagan activity). The two criteria for peer appraisal were ‘accuracy’ and ‘fluency’. In keeping with Barbara Pavey and colleagues’ suggestion that a dyslexia-friendly classroom seeks to **develop students’ language skills, including vocabulary**, Sally engaged the students in a **discussion** of how they would define the term ‘fluency’. She also **reinforced understanding** of the terms ‘Leitmotif’ and ‘Harmony’, which she had previously introduced. As well as this, Sally also used the task as a vehicle for **reinforcing orientation prepositions**, which people with dyslexia often confuse (e.g. up / down; left / right, etc.). The **multisensory tool** of the keyboard was a good anchoring point for this reinforcement work.

Film Music - Leitmotif

Blue Task: Batman
Play through the Batman theme. Play it in octaves with your keyboard partner.

Purple Task: Harry Potter
Play the Harry Potter theme in your right hand. When it is fluent, add the bass part in your left hand. You could work in pairs for this to build up each part before you try it individually.

Pink Task: Darth Vader
Play Darth Vader's theme in your right hand. When it is fluent, add the harmony note under the melody. This is also in your right hand. When you can play this fluently, add the bass notes with your left hand. You could work in pairs for this to build up each part before you try it individually.

Leitmotif: Character theme (a melody that is heard every time you see a character in a film)

Harmony: when two notes are played at the same time to create a chord sound under the melody

Figure 2: Part of the music task sheet.

Demand	Accuracy	Fluency
PINK TASK 3	5	5
	Excellent	Excellent
PURPLE TASK 2	4	4
	Good	Good
BLUE TASK 1	3	3
	Competent	Competent
BLUE TASK 1	2	2
	Basic	Basic
BLUE TASK 1	1	1
	Limited	Limited

Figure 3: The music task appraisal sheet.

Both the task sheets (the keyboard pieces) and the appraisal sheets (attached to clipboards) were coloured-coded for difficulty and clearly laid out on cream paper (see Figures 2 and 3). Keyboard keys were labelled with note names to help learning.

Sally circulated between groups, offering encouragement and discussion. Students were well engaged throughout the observation period.

Year 11 English

We observed a Year 11 English class in their revision of key learning of the Shakespeare play, 'Macbeth', with teacher, Alex Flowers.

Students were **working in groups of four** around tables. Alex had devised a board game to revise key points from 'Macbeth' (see Figure 4 below). The students took turns in shaking the dice and moving a counter to land on different questions, which each team member attempted to answer, using support from teammates where necessary. Once again, we could see the Kagan principle of **cooperative learning** in action.

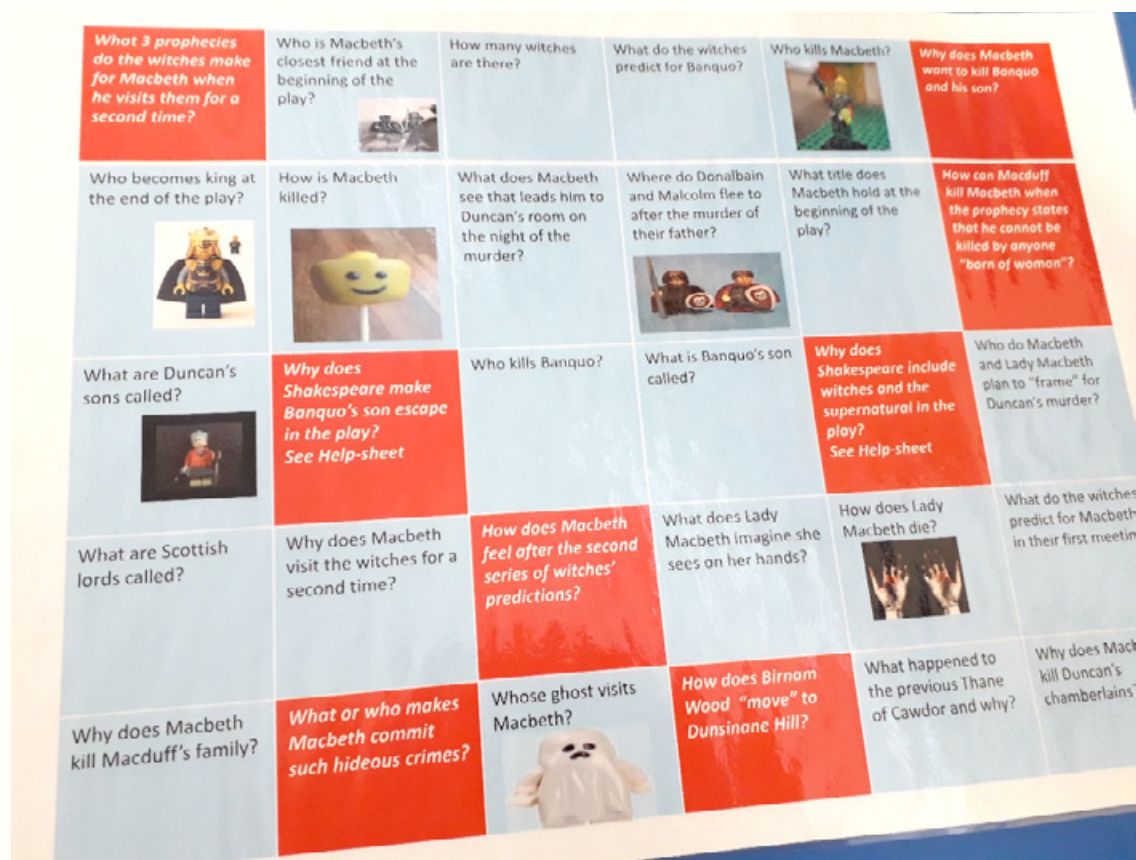


Figure 4: 'Macbeth' revision board game

Alex **modelled the task** with one group before all the other groups started. Alex put a clear **emphasis upon understanding over simple recall**. Once the activity was underway, Alex circulated amongst the groups, prompting discussion, and, at the end of the task, she encouraged students to **report which questions they had found most difficult to answer**. This feedback was then **written up on the whiteboard** by Alex (as a **future reference point for further revision**).

The next task for the groups was to use modelling clay to create any aspect of the play, 'Macbeth' (see Figure 5 below). Students would then visit other group tables and write on post-it notes what they thought that the model represented. This was a really **multisensory piece of learning**, which **encouraged much discussion** about aspects of 'Macbeth'.

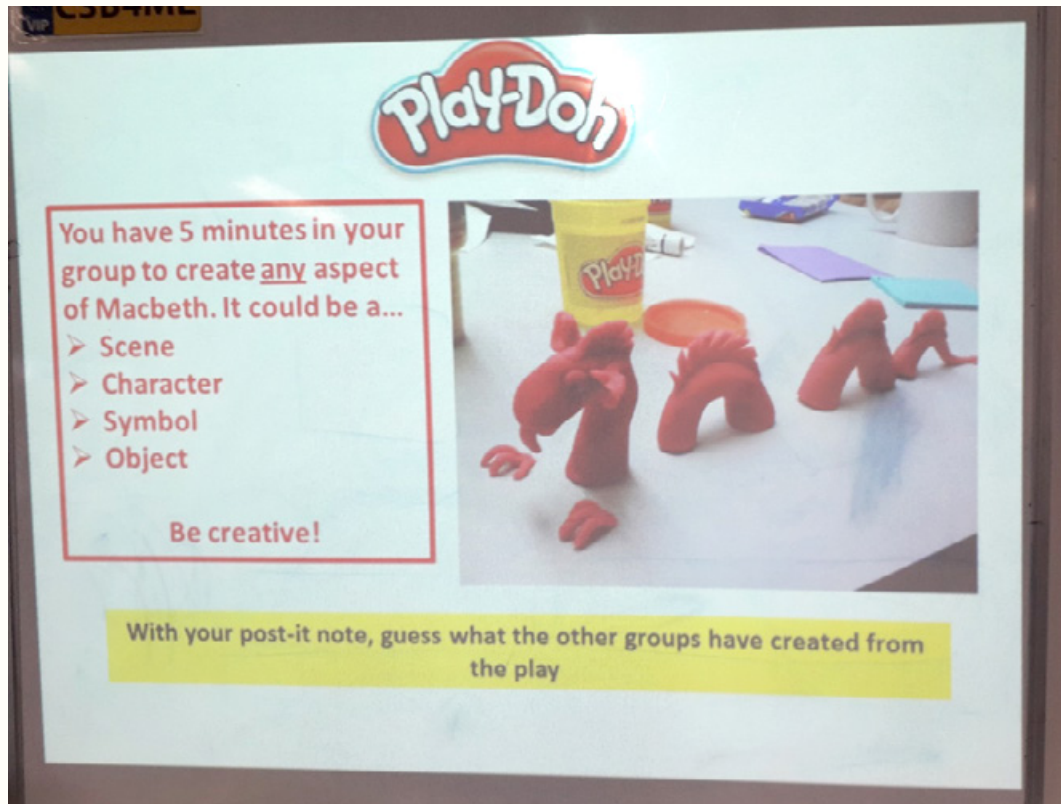


Figure 5: Interactive whiteboard instructions for task 2 of the Year 1 'Macbeth' revision lesson

Alex had found **creative ways of making the extra revision and overlearning** seem like **fun and not just like mere repetition** (so necessary to dyslexic students, according to dyslexia-expert, Dr Gavin Reid).

The Year 11 boys enjoyed both activities and were clearly engaged throughout the time of our observation.

Leor noted the important leadership role offered by SENCo, Michelle, in maintaining the impetus of the dyslexia-friendly school project.

“Michelle will still go round and find things that she isn’t quite happy with on her little audits. But they’re things that people are tweaking that they may just have forgotten to do or that we just need to refresh their memory about as members of staff, you know, in their busy days... It has made a massive difference. So definitely a culture shift, definitely moving in the right direction. Some staff are quicker and faster than others as you’d always expect, but everyone’s on board.”

So, in summary, the shift in teaching and learning towards more dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning practice at Wellacre has been built around the following key features:

- **staff training** for all teachers and TAs in dyslexia-friendly practice;
- **modelling of quality-first teaching** ideas and resources with the QFT file;
- supporting teachers in making small **changes to the physical teaching environments of their classrooms**;
- **modification of texts** used in teaching and **support for extended writing tasks** across the curriculum;
- developing **techniques and resources to support weaker working memory skills** in students with dyslexia (and with other SENs), including **multisensory teaching** and varied opportunities for **reinforcement of learning**;
- use of Kagan structures in **group work to support collaborative learning**.

4. Students' and Parents' Views

We interviewed two students in a paired interview: Matthew in Year 10 and Stephen in Year 9. We also conducted individual interviews with Matthew's mother, Mrs Mills and with the parent of another dyslexic student, Mr Bielly.

Matthew was very positive about his recent experiences as a student with dyslexia at Wellacre. He valued the fact that his teachers, especially in maths and science, showed a **sense of humour** and tried to **make their lessons fun**, but that they also appreciated the **need for reinforcement of learning**:

"So most of the things that Sir does, he like always goes over it again. So he does like at least one example on the board and then all you have to do is ask him and he'll do whatever question you're stuck on as well."

Stephen appreciated how his **teachers made lessons interesting** and how they went 'the extra mile' in **responding to individual needs**:

"I just enjoy like the teachers. Like the staff are amazing, they're all really friendly and...as soon as you ask them... like I have blue paper, so as soon as, stuff like that, they'll go and get it sorted."

The boys seemed aware of the move towards dyslexia-friendly teaching and that "it has definitely got better" and **"that makes me feel better about myself, my outlook"**. (Matthew)

Stephen had also noticed **changes to the classroom environments**. He was pleased with the **provision of coloured overlays for reading** and about the fact that the **interactive whiteboards were used with a background colour backfill**, which **reduced his visual stress**.

He noted the comparisons with the previous classroom set-ups at the school:

"Some classrooms still have an old whiteboard with a projector shining on it. Most of the classrooms have been changed, but there's still a few."

Matthew also noted the **positive effects of the staff dyslexia training**:

“I think the teachers, **they kind of understand more...** like they’ve been told... and they’ve got it there, that what the specifics are that like I need, and they can come over to me and ask me, you know what I need, do I need anything extra or stuff like that.”

They also **felt confident in asking teachers to respond to requests**, as Matthew pointed out:

“I struggle with reading and getting things down fast. Sometimes I can ask the teacher to slow down or something like that when they’re writing stuff down on the board”.

In expanding on support for his literacy difficulties, Matthew also noted how grateful he was for **access to 1:1 extra literacy support, with specialist TA**, Louisa, at Wellacre:

“I did extra English with her during French and Geography to try and support my English... I think it’s helped a lot with my confidence in English.”

In discussing study skills support, both boys were grateful for access to the materials and programmes on the Wellacre virtual learning environment. Stephen mentioned how helpful he found the ‘**Knowledge Organisers**’, **booklets for each subject in each school year**, which **summarise key learning points from each subject topic in dyslexia-friendly formats** (see Figure 6 overleaf).

Pure substance – a substance that contains only one type of atom with no impurities

Filtration

Distillation

Chromatograph

Element	Symbol	Element	Symbol
Nitrogen	N	Potassium	K
Sodium	Na	Copper	Cu
Chlorine	Cl	Hydrogen	H
Carbon	C	Helium	He
Cobalt	Co	Iron	Fe
Neon	Ne	Niobium	Nb
Gold	Au	Mercury	Hg
Silver	Ag	Boron	B
Oxygen	O	Fluorine	F

ATTRACTION

REPULSION

OR

Magnetic field lines, show the magnetic field, they travel from North to south pole

Magnetic metals – Iron, Cobalt, Nickel

Figure 6: a page from the Year 7 Science Knowledge Organiser.

Matthew noted that **homework tasks could be accessed through a homework app** called 'Class Charts'.

Overall, the boys showed a really positive attitude to school and an appreciation of how Wellacre is developing its dyslexia-friendly practice. The boys expressed a clear **understanding about where they could get help and support for learning**, be it a classmate, the subject teacher, their form tutor and / or the school's virtual learning environment.

Interviews with the two parents, Mrs Mills and Mr Bielly revealed that, not only were they **aware of Wellacre's project** to achieve the dyslexia-friendly schools award, but that they had been **actively encouraged to get involved** by the school. As Mrs Mills pointed out:

"... they encourage you to come in and there's meetings about dyslexia, there's meetings with your child. I'm quite 'hands-on', 'cos I don't want to hinder him, so I want to know how it's going to affect him, what's in place... So they've been quite good. They've always said that they're working towards this dyslexia award... because there's quite a number of kids with varying stages of dyslexia and other learning disabilities."

Both the parents were grateful for the **quality and frequency of communications with and from the school**. They mentioned telephone calls, letters and emails, though Mrs Mills expressed a preference away from emails, which she found were often submerged in the daily tide of emails in her computer inbox. She expressed a preference for telephone calls because "you're dealing with it there and then."

In addition to day-to-day communications, the parents noted appreciation of the **termly 'SEN Parents' Forum'** where school staff make **presentations on SEN subjects, including dyslexia**, and **parents had opportunities to discuss these** with the teaching staff and with each other.

In addition to direct contact with parents, Mr Bielly noted that a **leaflet about dyslexia had been provided for parents** by Wellacre.

Both parents recognised the **ability of Wellacre staff to hear their voice**. As Mr Bielly noted:

“I was worried about Charlie’s paying attention in lessons, so I asked the teachers to put him to sit near the front of the class and they did that; no problem.”

Mrs Mills was pleased with the **range of learning opportunities** and **resources available to students**, especially those with dyslexia, at Wellacre. She noted the provision of **laptop computers for student use**, the availability of **ACE Spelling Dictionaries**, especially designed for dyslexic students (see Figure 7), and the ‘Scribble Scrabble’ **literacy games club** in the morning at Wellacre.

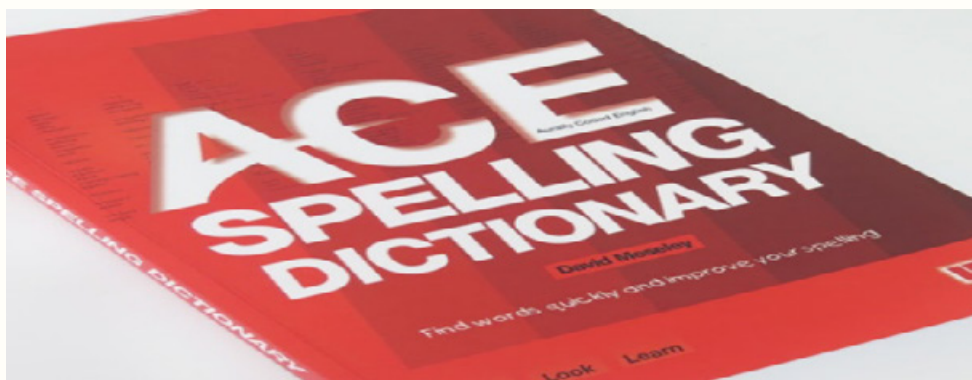


Figure 7: the ACE Spelling Dictionary, 4th Edition

Finally, the parents noted the positive changes in their children's outlook.

"He's definitely become more confident. When he first came he didn't want to go to Scribble Scrabble... he was very shy. But his actual teaching assistant and his mentor said that he's become so much more confident. So he's been brought on more, so that's good".

Mr Bielly stated simply:

"The school have always looked after Charlie. They've always been there for him."

So, in summary, students have appreciated the moves at Wellacre towards being a dyslexia-friendly school. They noted:

- teachers' **better understanding of dyslexia** and what it's like to have it;
- teachers being **responsive to individual needs** within the dyslexic school population;
- teachers providing **opportunities for learning reinforcement and revision**;
- confidence amongst students **to ask for needs to be met**;
- access to **extra individual literacy support**;
- the resources available on Wellacre's **virtual learning environment**.

For parents, the important aspects of Wellacre's dyslexia-friendly school project were:

- sharing the project with parents from its inception: **keeping them 'in the loop'**;
- **information on dyslexia** for parents;
- presentations in the **termly SEN Parents' Forum**;
- opportunities to **network with other parents** of students with dyslexia;
- **regular communications with parents** through a variety of media;
- **responsiveness to parents' concerns** about curriculum access for dyslexic students;
- the provision of **dyslexia-friendly resources** for student use;
- social and extra learning opportunities for dyslexic students through **literacy games clubs**.

5. Conclusions

Wellacre Academy has been on a journey and, despite their successful achievement of the Dyslexia Friendly Schools Award, that journey continues, with leadership vision and dynamic management to maintain the project's impact.

Wellacre's development of dyslexia-friendly practice has not only developed teacher confidence, student confidence and parental satisfaction, it has had a real impact on the school's academic performance. Headteacher Mel was pleased to be able to report that last summer's GCSE results for students with SEN were vastly improved, with 75% of those students achieving above Grade 4 English and 80% in Mathematics: well above the national average for that student cohort.

The background of the slide is a faded photograph of two male students in a computer lab. One student is seated at a desk, typing on a keyboard, while the other stands behind him, pointing at the computer monitor. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a modern educational environment.

Case Study 2

Blackpool Sixth Form College

1. Background to the Case Study

Blackpool College serves communities within a 20-mile radius along the Fylde coast in Lancashire. It has around 1,900 full time students, mostly aged between 16 and 19 years. Students come from coastal towns such as Blackpool, Fleetwood, Lytham St Anne's, and a number of rural towns and villages. A large proportion of students are from Blackpool, which is amongst the most deprived boroughs in the country.


The college offers a wide range of courses (over 50 'A' level and BTEC) and the majority of students are entered for academic qualifications (including 'A' level) with about a third taking a vocational qualification and a smaller number taking occupational qualifications. At its last Ofsted inspection in 2009, the college was reported as 'Outstanding' for effectiveness of provision, capacity to improve, quality of provision, and leadership and management, and as 'Good' for achievement and standards. 'A' level pass rates are currently reported (2017) as consistently above the national average, with 85% of students going on to university or other higher education courses.

The college first achieved the Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark from the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) in 2014 and this was led by one of their specialist dyslexia teachers, Jeanette. In 2016, Jeanette attended a free one day 'Train the Trainer' event on Neurodiversity that was offered as part of a BDA led DfE funded project. This was cascaded to staff at the college prior to re-verification of the Quality Mark in 2017.

2. Leadership and Management


Ofsted (2009) reported that the leadership team set clear strategic direction and that staff were well motivated. Current interviews with six members of senior management (including the Head of Student Support, Deputy Principle, and Assistant Principle) revealed a **well-established team** with many years of experience. They reported that the college decided to go for the Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark in order to 'improve outcomes for young people with dyslexia' but acknowledged that it benefitted all students. Training in this area was provided for all staff by a learning support tutor with **specialist qualifications in dyslexia** under the guidance of the Head of Department. There was an emphasis on neurodiversity so that members of staff were aware of a range of learning needs and how to meet them. Having a well-qualified and experienced member of staff to lead the training was seen as an important factor in the success of the project as she not only had credibility but also the knowledge and skills to support other tutors following the training sessions. The importance of gaining the Quality Mark was emphasised by the senior management team as, although they felt they were doing a good job, it gave them 'a benchmark' to compare to and made them more aware of what was happening nationally. Another point they raised was that the process enabled them to develop their practice 'across the board', looking at recruitment, induction, programmes and systems; how to market the college to students and parents; and enabled them to explore how to 'do things better', not just for learners with dyslexia but for all students. They noted that probably one person could not achieve the level of success they had on their own. The trainer (Jeanette) had a team around her, the support of the Head of Department, the support of the college and of peers, which made a difference and provided the enthusiasm needed to succeed.


An initial audit of the college in 2012-13 had revealed whole college screening and consistent training as areas for development with the knowledge and skills of the Additional Learning Support team being identified as strengths. However, these were not being shared across the whole staff body. The process of going for the Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark allowed practices to be shared. Staff who had previously been a bit reluctant to engage with training 'bought into it' because of the practical nature of the activities and the **level of ongoing support**.



Jeanette went into the various departments to deliver both **generic and bespoke training** and to offer guidance and support. Guidelines for developing dyslexia-friendly practice were put on Google drive for staff to access and drop-in sessions were available. Sessions on dyslexia were incorporated into the development programme and annual August staff training. In addition, one-page student profiles were produced and shared, and a registration system set up that flagged vulnerable students and enabled tutors to click on a link to see information unique to them. The message was that **everybody would benefit** from the process: the college and members of staff as well as students. There was also a strong belief amongst the senior management team that as staff develop their skills they spur others on to succeed too; as one of them put it, ‘a rising tide raises all ships’. This was evident in the way they encouraged staff to **share best practices**. For example, one day per year each department sets up stands and everyone visits, so that they share Quality First Teaching practices. There was a large focus in the college on everyone sharing responsibility for supporting all young people, including those with dyslexia. Senior management reported greater use of differentiation and access strategies evident in lesson observations and ‘walk throughs’ since the training sessions.

They also noted a greater level of confidence amongst students, the recognition that ‘it’s not just me’, and expressed the belief that the work they had done had supported students in feeling part of the college and in feeling capable of achieving. Students were also seen as being ‘more open’ about their difficulties and able to talk to staff about it. They were able to feedback their feelings through focus groups and via the student questionnaires that were completed at the end of the course. They also had a key support worker that they met with on a regular basis. The management team reported that they had observed improvements recently in the way students **took ownership** of the support they were receiving. They felt that changes in pre-enrolment had facilitated this. Previously it had just been a ‘tick box’ but they now collected much more information from the student about barriers to learning, strengths and perceived support needs at pre-enrolment and so they felt a sense of ownership from the start. Parents were also encouraged to be involved in the college. They received regular reports on progress and had **regular contact with key workers**. When a problem arose, the key worker contacted parents to try to work it out together.





In terms of wider impact, they reported greater confidence in school partners and parents of prospective students as a result of being able to say they had the 'Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark' and that this permeated to all stakeholders. A further outcome was that it had led the college to consider other quality marks and they were now looking at the LGBT Quality Mark, although that was via Lancashire LA as opposed to a national quality mark. They attributed the success of the project to having sufficient expertise, the right person to lead it, a team around that person to support them, everybody 'buying into' it, being able to see an immediate impact so that staff could see that the energy they were putting into it was working, and, importantly, the support of the principal and senior management team.

They acknowledged that the amount of evidence they needed to collect initially was a bit daunting and that there was the feeling of 'what if we think we're really good and actually it seems like we're not really good'. However, they found the initial audit by the British Dyslexia Association positive in that it identified a number of areas where they were very strong as well as some for them to develop, and from that point on it did not seem so daunting.

A potential 'block' to the success of the project might have been student reaction to the screening procedures set up, as this involved testing young people who had just come from schools where they had sat GCSE examinations and then they were being tested again. However, they felt that the solution lay in how they talked to the schools and young people about it so that they felt part of the process and realised that it was necessary to support them effectively. It had now become just **custom and practice** to screen students at induction. Students also had a pastoral mentor session where they produced a piece of personal writing that formed part of the screening.

Another potential 'block' was money: the cost of the screening and the cost of the Quality Mark. It was not considered to be a vast amount but still an additional cost. However, the attitude of the senior management team was that you had to understand the value of anything that you put money into and they felt it was 'real value for money', that it delivered, and there was evidence that it was working. Outcomes were **improving year on year** in terms of academic success and in terms of recruitment – in 2016 they had 70 students on roll with dyslexia and in 2017 they had 93, which they felt reflected the confidence people had in them. They reported that students felt it was a 'safe place', more of them were 'disclosing', and consequently they were able to put better support in place. They pointed out that in 2015 just over 72% of young people with dyslexia met or exceeded their minimum target grade and in 2017 it was 81.4%, which compared to 78.4% for all students.

The college has just gone through a reverification process with the British Dyslexia Association and that also has led them to reflect on their practices. It has made the senior management team realise that when they talk about inclusion they tend to focus on the students and they are now asking themselves if the focus should be on their community.


In summary:

- a specialist dyslexia qualified tutor led the training;
- she had the support of senior management and a team around her;
- becoming more dyslexia-friendly was seen as being beneficial to all;
- immediate impact was seen, as well as long term;
- exam results have improved year on year.

3. Developing Dyslexia-Friendly Teaching and Learning at Blackpool Sixth Form College

To find out more about the process of becoming dyslexia-friendly, two members of staff were interviewed: an art teacher and an English teacher. They had initially been made aware that the college was going for the BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Kitemark through staff training. The English teacher (Elaine) explained that they have ongoing staff training throughout the year but certain topics, such as safeguarding, require all members of staff to attend and that the dyslexia awareness training was given the same **status**. The specialist dyslexia tutor (Jeanette) discussed with them what gaining the Quality Mark would mean for them and showed them slides from around the college depicting the good practice that was already in place. Elaine pointed out that the way it was presented to them by Jeanette reinforced what they already knew to be **good practice** before considering where they could develop further. The initial session was delivered four times in one day to different members of staff and then the PowerPoint was put on the shared drive. Elaine felt that members of staff 'bought into it' not only because they could see its value but because it was given the status of being compulsory. She did not see this as a negative thing but as **enabling all teachers** (for in some of the schools she had worked in it was just the English department that had been 'tasked with making everything dyslexia-friendly').

Although she had prior experience of teaching students with dyslexia, Elaine said it was only since joining the college that she consciously thought about how to support them and included this in her lesson planning. Previously she had just assumed that she was making appropriate adjustments to meet their needs. Elaine confirmed information given by the senior management team regarding the support available and added that the trainer went into departments to work on a 1:1 basis with teachers who had asked for further support to enable them to make their teaching more dyslexia-friendly. She also mentioned that **examples of dyslexia-friendly strategies** were put on the shared drive in the staff area so that they could see what colleagues were doing in their lessons.



Evidence of becoming more dyslexia-friendly could be seen, she pointed out, in the displays around the college and in the detail now added to student profiles. Whereas previously she had just written 'dyslexia' in the box for additional needs, since the training on neurodiversity she has thought about how dyslexia manifests itself in that particular student. She felt that she had become **more proficient** not only at meeting identified needs but also at 'spotting' it in the first place. Since the training, she felt she was more intuitive and did not wait for students to be officially screened for dyslexia but examined the first piece of work they produced for her. Elaine felt that her **increased awareness** had changed the way she put PowerPoints together for her lessons, for example, cutting down on the amount of information on a slide, as well as board work. She made greater use of displays; an example was given of a starter activity in which students had to go to a display at the back of the classroom, choose a piece of literary criticism and apply it to a poem of their choice. Elaine explained that the way lessons were presented had changed, with more of a mixture of content based (note taking), peer based (discussion), and skills based (practical) activities. Students were allowed to record work in a **greater variety of ways** since the training, e.g. choosing to create an object from playdough, produce a mind-map or bullet points, or write a paragraph. Fewer student handouts were given now but were used more effectively. They were not just for information but formed the basis of activities such as 'summarising the information provided in six key bullet points'. Through the tasks set, Elaine can check the understanding of all students. One of the key ways of doing this, she said, was through the 'final essay' which students wrote at a rate of one a week – 32 in total. Since the original dyslexia awareness training, she had also thought more about scaffolding and structuring learning and breaking it down into manageable tasks, which she felt benefitted all learners. She referred to a three year upward trend, with the latest data showing a 50% increase in the number of higher grades at A*, A, and B compared to the previous year.

Student voice is also something that Elaine had been working on. She mentioned an approach called 'SHOW', which is a sharing and observation week. The feedback from SHOW the previous year suggested that 90% of the students were happy with the teaching and learning in English lessons. Students were also given the opportunity to indicate what could be improved and there is now greater emphasis on study skills.

The stock phrase of ‘Oh, you can’t revise for English Lit can you?’ has been met with ‘Oh yes you can’ and the response, ‘But you can’t revise for English, because you don’t know what the question’s going to be’ with, ‘Well no, but you could become so good at answering abstract questions that it doesn’t matter what the question is.’ The attention paid to developing **good study skills** has helped all students (including those with dyslexia) and made them more aware of what works for them and what does not. To raise awareness of what are the most effective strategies, students are given a list of ten peer strategies which they are encouraged to try out. In addition, the English department has a peer teaching programme where the Upper Sixth teach the Lower Sixth. If a student in the Lower Sixth achieves under their target grade, they are paired with an Upper Sixth student who mentors them.

In terms of achieving the Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark, Elaine noted a number of factors that contributed to developing a dyslexia-friendly college: **positive vibes** from senior management; the thought that this would benefit students and that they may also get an award for it; the fact they were a well-resourced college and that the Additional Learning Support team were **always available** to answer questions (in person, by phone and by email) and were very approachable. She pointed out that the English department had always worked very closely with the ALS team and this had meant that not too much modification of resources was needed for them following the training. She reflected that the way the training was delivered also aided the success – that lack of time is always a factor – when training is delivered in the evenings there is the temptation to put things off until the next holiday because of pressure of work ‘and then it never happens’, but in this case it was part of a two week block of CPD so staff tried out the activities and saw **immediate impact**. She also mentioned that all new members of staff were given a mentor which helped the college to sustain the success it has had.

The art teacher (Rebecca) also acknowledged that the **wealth of knowledge** of the trainer had contributed to the success of the project and added that her ability to direct other teachers to specific books on certain topics had been very beneficial. She pointed out that there is a lot more written work in art lessons than people might expect. She felt that a lot of students with dyslexia tried to ‘hide’ in those courses to avoid mainly written based courses.

However, students did need be able to annotate, produce a cohesive essay and use Harvard referencing. In the art department, tutors break down processes by asking students a series of pertinent questions, such as:

- What is the core of what you want to say here?
- What is going to directly get your message across about why you chose this artist?
- What is the impact of ...?

They work with students in a 1:1 formal dialogue to discuss language and allow students to write in note form if necessary before they formalise it. Assignments are broken down paragraph by paragraph and a list of questions suggested that the student should answer through personal dialogue for each aspect. The art department has found this **effective with all students**, not just those with dyslexia. There is additional support from other tutors on Harvard referencing and research techniques. Rebecca also gave an example of how ALS had supported a student who was taking three art courses with her. The student had chosen these courses to avoid written work but then found she had three essays to write which involved discussion about her own work. Rather than finding information from texts about other people's work the student had to take ownership of the dialogue – discuss how she had referred to other artists work and how she had been informed by them. She had received **consistent support** sessions from the ALS team to provide a structure and work through the questions. This led to, as Rebecca describes it, 'some fantastic outcomes' which resulted in the student gaining two A's and a B. Rebecca felt that the approach was so successful because it helped the students to reflect on what you do as an artist, that the act of writing the essay informed practice, and that research into what influenced other artists at a particular period of time impacted on their own work. She mentioned that students with dyslexia were particularly welcomed by staff in the art department because a number of them had dyslexia themselves. The ALS team support staff with dyslexia as well as students. Rebecca felt that the training had really built awareness that support was available for staff, too, and this had made them **more confident** in asking for help and, in turn, in supporting the students.

There was the opportunity during the visit to see the principles of dyslexia-friendly teaching in action through two lesson observations.

Media lesson

The first observation was of an 'A' level media lesson. Lesson objectives were **shared** via a PowerPoint and links to previous learning were made via reference to a Dracula clip shown in the previous lesson. The main focus of the lesson was to develop the students' knowledge and use of media language, in particular, that associated with gothic horror films. Some of the different recording methods mentioned by the English teacher were evident in the media lesson, e.g. mind-maps, bullet points, prose and lap tops, demonstrating **consistency** across different curriculum areas. There was also a mixture of formal and informal teaching methods, including PowerPoint, video clips, paired discussion, and individual / paired computer activities. The PowerPoint had a pale blue background to avoid possible glare caused by black on white print (which can cause print to move or become blurred in learners experiencing visual stress) and sentences were well spaced as learners with dyslexia often find dense text difficult to read. Language associated with Gothic horror was elicited from students after watching a series of video clips and written on a white board for reference. Again, care was taken not to have black on white print and a blue pen was used. Students engaged in activities based on video and posters to explore the conventions of the horror genre. In taking feedback from paired discussion to the whole group, students were asked to explain the vocabulary they used, and this reinforced the concepts being taught. **Understanding was checked** through a computer activity using the following poster:



Students had to consider how the poster indicated that the film would be a gothic horror film and then answer a series of questions about semiotic codes.

All handouts from the lesson were shared with students electronically, giving learners with dyslexia the opportunity to read in advance at their own pace and revisit information easily. This took into account slower reading speed and the need to reread text (learners with dyslexia often have working memory difficulties affecting the recall and retention of information).

Study Skills (Geography) Lesson

The second observation was of a study skills lesson delivered by the geography teacher at the end of a topic to support students in revising for exams. The purpose of the lesson was to raise the students' **metacognitive awareness** of which revision techniques would work best for them. Again, there was evidence of consistent approaches being used **across departments**. A PowerPoint was used to discuss ten key strategies for exam revision, in a similar way to that described by the English teacher. A coloured background was used to avoid black on white print, as observed in the media lesson. A mixture of formal and informal teaching approaches was also used, including PowerPoint, class discussion, individual / paired activities. Students were encouraged to give **examples of strategies** they had already tried to the rest of the class. A 'Learning Style Inventory' was used to raise students' awareness of the way they learned best. Students completed this individually before trying out some of the ten strategies to discover which would work best for them.

In summary:

- high status given to the training sessions and BDA Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark;
- reinforced knowledge of good practice as well as identifying areas for development;
- both generic and bespoke training given;
- support was always available;
- close links between the English department and Additional Learning Support team;
- staff able to try out the strategies right away and to see immediate impact;
- consistent approaches observed across departments.

4. Students' and Parents' Views

Student Views

Three students with dyslexia were interviewed in a group interview: Beth, Katie and Georgia, all in their second year at the college. Beth was studying 'A' level triple science, having changed course from double science and music because she found group work in music distracting and preferred subjects where she could work alone. Kate was studying double science and geography at 'A' level. Georgia was also studying triple science but had changed from 'A' level to BTEC and had an extra year of work to catch up.

The students noted a number of things that were different at college compared to school: more free time, more flexible working, and more study time. For one student, this meant that she could do a part-time job as well as study. She played basketball after college and on those days stayed after lessons to study. There was also **dedicated study time** on timetables and, during these periods, students could **access the hub**, where there was support from a member of staff. This meant that they did not have to take as much homework home with them as they had to do at school.

Katie felt that the college was well resourced and that she had sufficient support but noted that the food was expensive. The students were asked to reflect on what could be improved at the college. They mentioned slower pace of lessons, reviewing work regularly and extra support with assignments. Kate said that science was going well but the pace at which the geography curriculum was delivered was too fast for her and it would be helpful if it could be slowed down. She appreciated that the teacher was moving quickly so that there would be time for revision at the end of the topics but said the fast pace meant that she did not always understand it in the first place. She felt she needed to review lessons as she went along, rather than at the end of the course, and so relied on the support of teachers in the student hub to go over things again with her. Science worked much better for her as the pace was slower, although it sometimes meant that she was writing an assignment on one topic whilst studying the next topic, which could be confusing.

Students were aware of their strengths and weaknesses and had started to take some **responsibility for their own learning**. Beth identified practical and visual activities as strengths; Katie, mathematics – working out equations – particularly where numbers only needed to be inserted rather than writing everything down; and Georgie, work ethic (she had little free time as she had changed courses and needed to catch up).

When they were asked what it meant to them to be dyslexic, all three students focused on negative aspects. For Georgia it meant being unable to read – she explained that when she looked at a word she just picked out letters she recognised and then ‘made it up’ (guessed). She also found spelling difficult and again said that it was ‘all made up really’. Georgie used her iPad for writing but was not aware of any other support strategies she could use, although she did acknowledge that she received 1:1 support and computer software was available via Google apps.

Beth identified comprehension as an issue – ‘making sentences make sense’. She had a **coloured overlay** to help with visual stress but said that coloured paper would be helpful too. The college had provided Beth with a **reading pen** which scans print and gives word definitions but because she was left handed she could not always get it to scan properly. She had spoken to someone in her family who told her that there were reading pens that you can flip so that they can be used left handed. However, she had to use her current pen right handed. Beth also found spelling difficult and ‘explaining things’, and needed more time to organise her thoughts. She made good use of the support available in the student hub and used an **iPad** for writing as coloured paper was not available but she could change the background colour on her iPad.

For Katie it was absorbing and understanding questions that she found most difficult, as well as expressing herself. She mentioned that she could read information four or five times and still not absorb it and that when asked to express ideas, words would come out in the wrong order. Katie also had been provided with a reading pen and she felt comfortable asking teachers for support (via the student hub) with reading for meaning. However, she felt it would help if there was more **opportunity to discuss work** in lessons and if she had a separate room for assessments with a computer and a reader. She mentioned sometimes having to work in a room with a lot of other students and no reader.

Beth agreed that this had been an issue for her, too, but one of the tutors from the student hub had said he would act as **reader** for key assessments from now on. However, Katie did not think that the tutor fully understood her needs. She said that extra support had been put on her support plan, but she was not sure if all teachers had looked at it. Georgie had changed to BTEC so that she no longer had to study for exams.

All three students had **clear ideas** of where they wanted to go when they left college. They noted that there was quite a lot of **careers advice** at the college. Georgia wanted to go into the Royal Marines as she had attended cadets for 8 years. Katie wanted to go to university to study to be a paramedic, and Beth also wanted to go to university to study zoology. They were all **willing to disclose their dyslexia** as they recognised that this was necessary to get procedures put in place. Georgia was in classes with students she knew from school and so had been able to discuss it with them. Both Katie and Beth said that they had friends at the college whom they had disclosed their dyslexia to and who were willing to go through work with them and explain things to them. This appeared to be a key part of their **support network**.

One of the things they found most difficult at college was completing assignments. As one student put it: 'extra time sucks'. She explained that if you are given extra time for an assignment then it means that all the others just pile up because there is still the same amount to do. It was a support strategy that they refused to use because they felt it would 'backfire... it's a case of being on top of your work and coming to every lesson to understand it.'

In summary:

- **more flexibility** than at school;
- **dedicated study time**;
- ready access to **student hub with tutor support**;
- sufficient **ALS support** available (but other types of support identified as beneficial also);
- **safe environment** – student willing to disclose their dyslexia;
- **good support network** including peer support.

5. Conclusions

Blackpool Sixth Form College continues to develop its dyslexia-friendly practices. Regular staff training and support from the Additional Learning Support Team maintains awareness, and ensures that basic accessing strategies are in place and that there is some consistency across the college in teaching and learning approaches. They have developed a culture in which students feel safe and are willing to disclose their dyslexia. This has allowed students to develop a peer support network that is a key part to managing their dyslexia. The student hub also plays a key role in supporting them with their studies, providing tutors to: review lesson content, discuss assignments, support written work, explain emails, structure tasks, support job / university applications, etc. Recent training on neurodiversity has helped teachers to develop strategies that meet a wider range of needs and improve learning for all students. This has improved the success rate in general, with above the national average number of passes at 'A' level in 2017. The number of students with dyslexia who are meeting or exceeding their target grade has also increased to 81.4%.

Student voice is encouraged and there are formal procedures in place for feeding back on the quality of teaching and learning, with opportunities to suggest where improvements might be made. The student interviews conducted as part of the project enabled three young persons to probe their feelings about their dyslexia in depth, how it manifested itself and the support available to them, and to reflect on what else might be beneficial. This gave some insights into where the college might go next in continuing to develop inclusive practices and student support, for example by:

- providing greater opportunities for discussion and practical activities in some subjects;
- formalising support available from subject teachers as well as ALS staff on Personal Learning Plans (more opportunity to talk through the content of assignments with subject teachers);

- considering alternative formats for checking understanding and progress to relieve some of the pressure created by the number of written tasks given (extra time was not seen by the students as a viable support strategy), e.g. recording ideas by drawing a diagram; producing a chart, table or poster; giving an oral presentation or making a digital recording.

It was due to the ethos of the college and the hard work teachers had put into developing student voice that these three students felt able to discuss sensitive issues with us.

The background of the slide features a faded image of a person's hands interacting with a tablet. The tablet screen displays a blue interface with a circular graphic and the word 'TALK'. To the left of the tablet, there is a solid green vertical bar and a green circle. In the bottom right corner, there is a decorative pattern of green circles with white outlines. The text 'Case Study 3' is in a dark blue font, and 'St. Luke's School' is in a larger, bold, dark blue font, underlined with a blue line.

Case Study 3

St. Luke's School

1. Background to the Case Study

St. Luke's School is a co-educational Hertfordshire Local Authority-maintained foundation special educational needs school for boys and girls 9-19 years old with learning difficulties, including complex moderate difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and speech, language and communication needs.

The school is situated on two sites 12 miles apart. The main site (the Redbourn site) provides for 9–16 year olds, while the Forest House Education Centre caters for 11–19 year olds.

St. Luke's includes in its curriculum a commitment to learning outside the classroom and has 'Forest School status'. The school's website emphasises its links with other schools and the local community, as its web page explains:

'We have superb partnerships with special and mainstream schools, businesses and organisations in our community that are actively engaged to ensure the "mainstream world" is understood as everyone's world and that we at St. Luke's all have a place and an active role to play in it.'

St. Luke's has 116 children on the school roll, with all students on the Special Educational Needs Register and 38% of students in receipt of the Pupil Premium.

The school is organised into classes, each with its own full-time class teacher. The curriculum is taught mainly through topic-based approaches, emphasising cross-curricular, inter-subject links.

In March 2017, St. Luke's achieved the **British Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark** for its dyslexia-friendly good practice.

Our team at Manchester Metropolitan University decided to aim to capture what St. Luke's were doing at their main Redbourn site, through interviews with the school's Senior Management Team (SMT), teaching staff, students identified as having dyslexia, and with a parent of a student with dyslexia. We also conducted short (30 minute) observations of two lessons at St. Luke's: a Key Stage 3 Geography and Maths class, and a Key Stage 3 Maths and Technology class. In these sessions, we also captured some of the good practice through digital photographs of the resources being used.

We gathered our data over the course of a school day in a visit coordinated by Mrs Irene Leach, Middle School Lead Teacher and the leader of the dyslexia-friendly school project.

2. Leadership and Management

We conducted a small group interview with three members of the SMT: Executive Head teacher, Mr Stephen Hoult-Allen; Acting Head of School, Mrs Carol Morris; and Assistant Head teacher, Mr Niyi Obembe.

When asked about what had inspired the school to embark upon the journey towards the BDA Dyslexia Friendly Kitemark, the team explained that this was a logical progression from the school's previous project of achieving autism accreditation. The process for this latter accreditation had begun with an audit of the school's current practice and this was used as a basis for continuous professional development for staff.

As Carol explained, "So this is where we started from, and we realised what a good process it was, as an audit means seeing where you are [and] where you need to develop."

So:

Step 1: The school asked its dyslexia specialist, Irene Leach, to **take the project lead** and she liaised with the leader of the previous autism-friendly practice to develop a project plan.

Step 2: an audit of the school's current capacity to support students with dyslexia. The audit revealed some pockets of very good practice, though there was by no means a consistency across the school and it was clear that many of the teaching staff lacked knowledge about the nature of dyslexia and ways to support dyslexic students. There was a need to develop better staff knowledge and expertise and a need for a more consistent approach across all classrooms and between key stage phases.

Step 3: the development of an Action Plan towards a dyslexia-friendly school, planned for a timescale of 18 months, with clear interim targets, lead staff for each action point, and arrangements for review. Figure 1, overleaf, shows a sample from the Action Plan.

British Dyslexia Association		ACTION PLAN FOR Spring (2) 2017		Dyslexia Friendly Quality Mark	
Standards Criteria Reference	Action to be taken	By Whom	Date to be Achieved		
1.1	Amend the working of the Teaching and Learning development plan to identify specifically how key priorities are addressing the needs of all pupils, including those with dyslexia, across the 3 core subjects.	DB T&L Governors and Core Subject Leaders T&L Development Plan	Before 23 rd March 2017		
1.2	School policies to include specific mention of dyslexia. Also: Curriculum documentation to be updated to include information of how SpLD pupils are supported: Literacy/Numeracy/Integrated Learning.	DB T&L Policy Curriculum Statements	Next Full policy review 2016-2017 Curriculum Statement standardised template. Spring 2 2017		
1.3, 2.1, 2.4, 3.1	Catch - up training on multisensory/memory approaches to teaching and learning.	IL			
1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.1, 2.7	Dyslexia Awareness training: Parents/Carers Seminar; Dyslexia info. For Handbook/Supply staff / Induction Handbook. Organise catch-up training for absent staff/ new staff including non-teaching.	IL / DB / NO / JF	Parent Seminar – 23 rd Feb 2017 Gov's meeting - March 2017 Spring 2 2017		
1.7	Data and progress; inc. Dyscalculia/Literacy data and progress.	DB/JCa/LE/SB/KQ	Before 23 rd March 2017		
1.10	Outreach Project	CM	Start April 2017		
2.1, 4.5	Develop awareness of pupils' learning styles.	IL	Spring/Summer 2017		
2.8	Data: quantitative & qualitative. Governor's feedback questionnaire. Coffee morning/forum for parents and feedback	DB/JCa/LE/SB/KQ NO/IL	Before end of March 2017 Summer 2017		
3.1	Learning walks – review of targets.	IL/CM/RA	Mid March 2017		
3.2	Audit Skills Group resources. Memory skills development - ICT	LE/RA/JCa/IL JCa	Spring 2 2017		
	Dyslexia Awareness training for all Non-teaching staff.		TBA		
	iPad Apps; meeting with AStorey from Windermere SpLD Base; Chris Cater iPad training		Spring 2017		
	Review & Complete Evidence Document.	CM/IL	Before 23 rd March 2017		

Figure 8: Sample from the school's dyslexia-friendly school project Action Plan.

As can be seen from the sample in Figure 8, the Action Plan placed an emphasis on the **involvement of all stakeholders**, including non-teaching staff, school governors, and parents.

The other key dimension of the Action Plan was that **dyslexia-friendly practice should not be 'bolted on' to what the school already did, but built in**. Therefore, the Action Plan demanded that dyslexia-friendly practice should be an integral part of all school policies, for example, the Teaching and Learning Development Plan, Curriculum Documentation, etc.

Step 4: the rolling out of basic training for all stakeholders. Dyslexia awareness training was offered to all staff and parents / carers through a seminar, and for governors in the context of a governors' meeting.

Step 5: more thorough training for teaching staff, including multisensory teaching, supporting working memory in the classroom, and using ICT to support dyslexia-friendly teaching. The in-house training often used case studies of dyslexic students in the school as examples to help teachers focus upon how this training would be used in practice.

The training was led by project leader, Irene, as well as using some outside specialists, for example, from experts on using iPads and apps in the classroom, and from a local specific learning difficulties base at a dyslexia-resourced primary school.

Irene and members of the SMT monitored and supported the developments of dyslexia-friendly practice through learning walks and through the building of dyslexia-friendly practice targets in staff annual Professional Development Reviews (PDRs). Irene also offered **extra support to less confident members of the teaching staff**, through planning and delivering team-taught sessions with individual teachers.

As Head of School, Carol, noted,

“So that’s feedback-cum-training, as opposed to just standing at the front and delivering. We’re very much against just ‘delivering’: now it’s about participation.”

So, to summarise the SMT's involvement in the dyslexia-friendly school project at St. Luke's, they have:

- **used the model of the successfully completed autism-friendly school project** as a guide to develop the dyslexia-friendly school project;
- **identified a senior staff member** with specialist understanding of dyslexia-friendly practice **to lead the project and to drive it forward**;
- **audited current practice** at the school;
- **developed an Action Plan** for the project with a clear timescale;
- built in dyslexia-friendly practice into key **whole-school policy documentation**;
- identified **members of staff to take the lead on targets** in the Action Plan;
- offered **basic dyslexia awareness training to all stakeholders**, including school staff, parents and governors;
- led **further training on dyslexia-friendly teaching for teaching staff**, including practical team-teaching 'live' training in real lesson situations;
- **continually maintained the impetus of the project** through monitoring practice via learning walks, building dyslexia-orientated targets into staff PDRs, and extra support for less confident staff.

3. Developing Dyslexia-Friendly Teaching and Learning at St Luke's

To find out more about dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning at St. Luke's, we conducted interviews with two teachers: 'Mr. A' and 'Ms. B', both KS3 class teachers. We also conducted short (30 minute) observations of lessons: Ms. B's geography and maths lesson and Mr. A's maths and cookery lesson.

In this section, we have also drawn further upon the interviews with the members of the St Luke's SMT.

We first asked the two teachers what previous experience or training they had had in terms of working with dyslexic learners. Both explained that, although they had not had specific training in teaching dyslexic children, because they had both trained in pre-secondary phases as PGCE students (Mr. A as a Primary teacher and Ms. B as an Early Years specialist), they both had **experience of using multisensory approaches to teaching and learning** (multisensory approaches are regarded by dyslexia specialists, such as Barbara Pavey, as lying at the core of dyslexia-friendly teaching). They explained that they had already been encouraged to use multisensory approaches as part of the autistic-friendly school project.

Both colleagues had found project leader, Irene's, training useful. Mr. A found more **understanding of the neurological basis for dyslexia** helpful, as did Ms. B, though she also noted the importance of using this theoretical knowledge to aid her **identification of students with dyslexic-type difficulties** in the classroom. She said that she was able to use this new understanding to reflect upon her own practice between the weekly Wednesday dyslexia training sessions. So, as well as the content, the pacing of the training seems to have suited the two colleagues.

Another key message that our colleague took from the training was **the wide applicability of dyslexia-friendly approaches in the classroom:**

“The support that you can provide for dyslexic students works pretty much for any student, especially in our setting.” (Ms. B)

“I heard someone say before, you know, good special needs teaching is good teaching generally... I do some tutoring for a boy who’s at a mainstream secondary, for his maths. I do multisensory methods in the tutoring and it really works for him as well. So the more you move up through schools generally, the older they get, I think people move away from multisensory, maybe thinking that it’s childish, but a lot of children still need that, even when they get older. So, I do think that all children benefit from having those scaffolds.” (Mr. A)

Ms. B also felt that providing multisensory learning opportunities could help **develop student independence:**

“Making things visual for those that might struggle with the reading gives them that independence, doesn’t it?... So I’m always asking myself, ‘how do we get them to need the least adult input possible?’...that kind of thing.”

Another dimension of a multisensory approach that the two colleagues had learned for an inclusive way of teaching language skills was ‘shape coding’, as Mr. A explained:

“So essentially, if you’ve got a verb or like a ‘doing’ word, it would be a yellow hexagon, that helps them make that link to the word’s job.”

Some examples from St Luke’s are shown in Figure 9, overleaf.

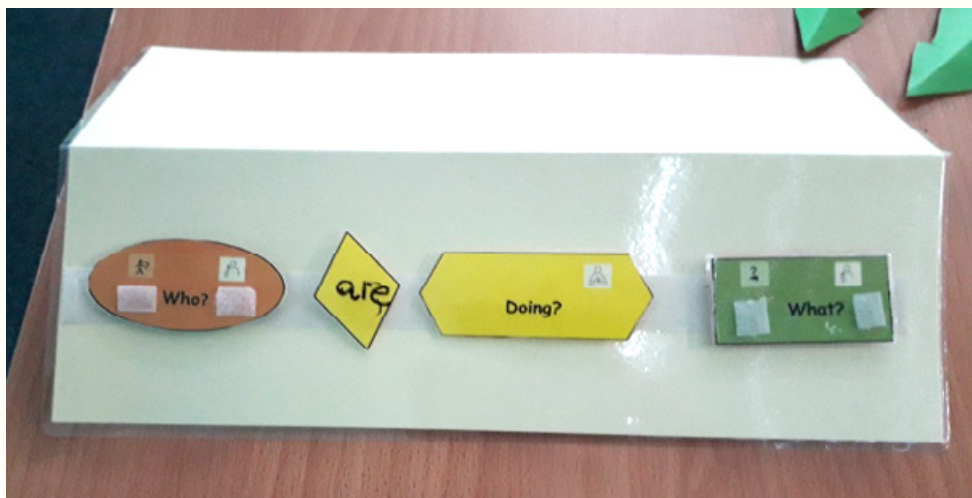


Figure 9: examples of shape coding.

Using images and shape to support text are now a regular feature of teaching materials. The teachers reported that, in preparing dyslexia-friendly resources, they had begun to change their starting points in design:

“You just get into the habit of it, so then that’s your process and you’re thinking, you know, ‘How can I make this more visual? How can I do this? How can I do that?’” (Mr. A)

We asked Mr. A and Ms. B what impact they thought that these dyslexia-friendly teaching approaches were having on the students:

“I think that the main thing that I see really is the confidence. So, you get children that will come in and they would almost refuse to record... they would absolutely despise any form of writing, because, you know, their spelling isn't great... and they wouldn't want to do it or they'll write very short... or they'll pick words that are very simple and they know how to write... But it's having that understanding and saying, 'well it doesn't matter if it's spelled perfectly... as long as we can read it, or you can read it back to me and I can scribe over the top.'... And then you start to see this amazing sort of creativity and their confidence grows and they're happy to have a go... I've got one girl in my class who used to hate writing... now every chance she gets, she's there writing stories, writing song lyrics.” (Mr. A)

Another positive impact on the students reported was **improved self-esteem**. As Ms. B reported:

“I have this student... he's only at St. Luke's because of his reading levels. He looks around and he can see the other students that are able to read, and it's really got him down. But now, with multisensory learning and the visual supports for reading, he's been able to do reading tasks independently. He used to be very, very aggressive in literacy lessons and often swear and storm out... Now he can get through a literacy lesson with very limited frustration. There's a significant improvement in behaviour that I've seen.”

Mr. A feels that the development of dyslexia-friendly approaches has benefitted by being coupled with **strong messages to the students about their potential**:

“I think we sort of **encourage a growth mind-set** as well, so just to say that whatever level we're at, we just want to practise more and get better”.

In using the phrase, 'growth mind-set', Mr. A is using the approach advocated by the Stanford University psychologist, Dr Carol Dweck, who suggests that someone can approach goals with a fixed mind-set about the limits of potential or a growth mind-set that always emphasises the possibility of change.

We then asked Mr. A and Ms. B about student feedback on their learning. Both noted that this was a constant feature of their classrooms:

“We encourage the children to feedback to us, you know, what kind of activities they had enjoyed. These things are for their... cognition... you know, ‘What did you find a bit easier? Why do we think that was?’ So I think we’re constantly adapting to how the children go on with it.” (Mr. A)

“We hopefully have a very safe environment for them to feel open to share when things are difficult, when they tell us ‘actually that was too difficult’, then we can differentiate and support that.” (Ms. B)

This element of **student voice** was also a factor in selecting topics to teach as vehicles for the curriculum:

“Well, the beginning of this year was the introduction to having control over how we teach every subject. So, it was amazing because... I don’t know if you’ve heard of PLODS?... it’s specific lines of enquiry. So, we sat down and sort of said what we were interested in and how can we make that into a sort of history, geography, science-based stuff. So, Space was one of the things that we came up with. So, they wanted to know more about Space, they wanted to know if there was life on Mars: they were absolutely fascinated. So that was the one that most excited them so we went with that this term: so it’s just following their lines of enquiry and we’re just pulling in curriculum stuff into how to cater for that.” (Ms. B)

Figure 10, overleaf, shows the fruits of Ms. B’s class’s labours: the learning wall developed from the Space project.



Figure 10: Ms B's class Learning Wall developed from their Space project.

We asked what had contributed to the success and maintenance of the dyslexia-friendly school project. The two colleagues noted project leader Irene's dynamic driving through of the initiative and her on-going support for staff. They also noted the fact that dyslexia-friendly practice informed a range of key policies:

"As leader of maths, and H [Ms. B] is sort of co-leader for maths, it's part of the policy. The Numeracy Policy mentions, you know, how we teach for children with dyslexia... or how we teach generally that caters for children with dyslexia... And the policy reflects our practice... if it's in the policy we have to do it... and you go round and you see people doing it all the time."

"It's not just that it's our duty to do it: it's not just ticking boxes. It's about positive attitudes and welcoming it; it's a cultural change." (Ms. B)

We had a chance to see these ideas and approaches in action during two 30-minute lesson observations on the day of our visit to St Luke's.

Ms. B's Class: maths and geography. Friday, 9 a.m.

The geography theme was Germany. Ms. B had set up the room with group tables and had organised a German 'brunch' featuring German food, which was being served to the tables by one of the pupils acting as 'waiter'. He was taking orders from the 'customers' (students) for food and drinks, which were being chosen from the priced menu.



Figure 11: in the German 'café'

The maths theme was money so the students were paying and getting change. They each had a limited supply of money in their moneyboxes, so had to work out how much they had left after paying for their orders.

To enhance the atmosphere, Ms. B was playing traditional Bavarian music and projecting slides of the Bavarian landscape onto her whiteboard screen. This felt like a really multisensory experience for the students.

In their groups, the students then had to use prepared sentence strips to ask each other questions about Germany (see Figure 12). They were encouraged to ask an individual, who could draw on the other group members for support if necessary. Here, Ms. B was using Kagan structures effectively and the students were well engaged with the task, as well as enjoying the food and drinks!



Figure 12: Question strips for the students about Germany

Ms. B's **room was colourful and attractively decorated** with displays of the students' work, including the learning wall from the 'Space' project (see Figure 10).

There was a **timetable for the day's activities** written on the whiteboard so the students could see their day mapped out and could see where they were up to. Ms. B also had **managing emotions cards** for each student. Each of these offered images reminding the student what s/he can do depending upon what feelings 'zone' they felt themselves to be in. This is an integral part of St. Luke's learning policy, where children are actively encouraged to be aware of their emotions and how they can use strategies to manage these emotions (see Figure 13).

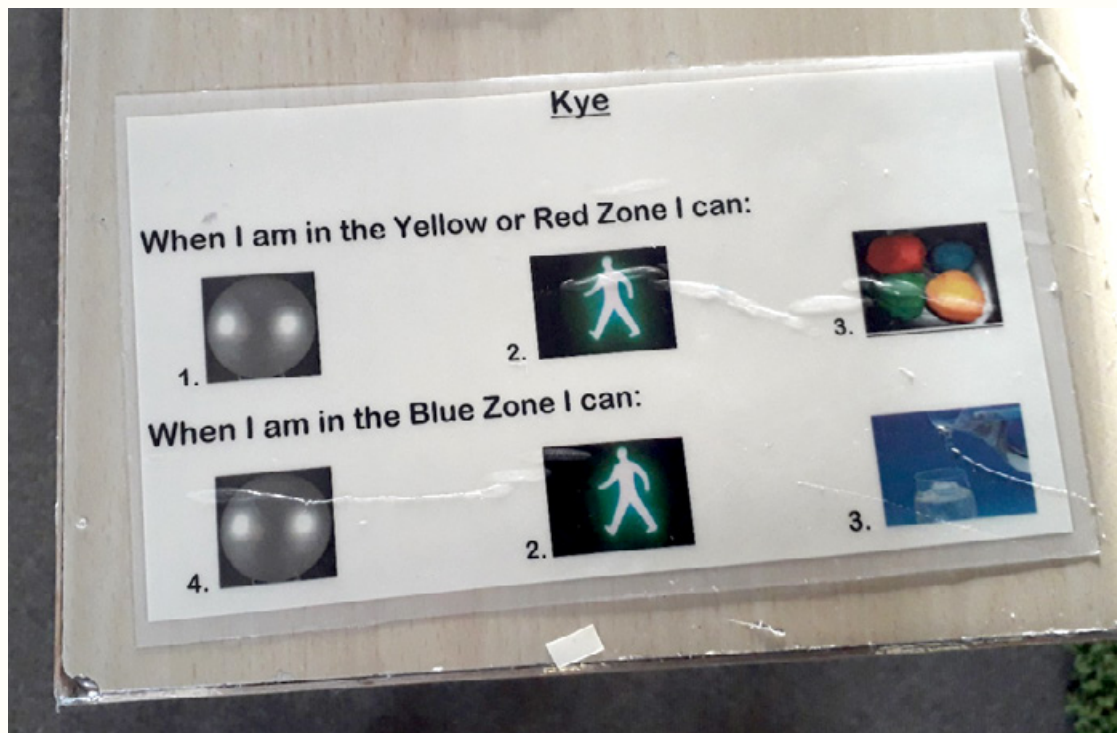


Figure 13: a Managing Emotional Zones card

So, for St. Luke's the social and emotional aspects of learning are just as important as the cognitive dimensions. Indeed, there is a clear awareness at the school of how these dimensions interact with and affect each other.

Mr. A's maths and technology lesson.

After break we observed Mr. A working with his Year 7-9 class preparing a recipe for a Christmas Yule log. Once again, following the PLODS approach described above, Mr. A's class had researched traditional Christmas foods and had elected to make a yule log. The technology side then was preparing a recipe using the correct utensils and an oven. The maths component was focussed upon weighing and measuring, including use of estimation skills.

To help the students follow the recipe, Mr. A had prepared laminated recipe instruction sheets (see Figure 14, overleaf), which he had **pre-taught before the practical session**, helping the students to read key vocabulary and to look out for keywords and phrases (highlighted in colour on the sheet). The sheet had **text supported with images** and acted as a checklist, so that each group would keep track of where they were up to, and to **support sequencing skills** so that they did not miss out any steps: skills that dyslexia expert, Barbara Pavey and her colleagues had noted may well need support in the dyslexia-friendly classroom.

Method








Preheat the oven to 180°C		<input type="checkbox"/>
Line a baking tray with baking paper and wipe on some butter. Keep this for later.		<input type="checkbox"/>
Add 6 eggs and 150g of caster sugar in a large bowl and whisk until thick and creamy.		<input type="checkbox"/>
Add 50g cocoa powder to the mixture and whisk in thoroughly.		<input type="checkbox"/>
Pour the mixture into the tin and spread gently with a spatula .		<input type="checkbox"/>
Bake for 20-25 minutes or until well risen and beginning to shrink away from the sides of the tin.		<input type="checkbox"/>
Meanwhile, make the icing:		
Add 200g of icing sugar and 200g of butter into a bowl and mix until smooth.		<input type="checkbox"/>
Add 1 teaspoon of vanilla essence		<input type="checkbox"/>
Melt 200g of chocolate in a heatproof bowl in the microwave.		<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 14: Yule recipe instruction sheet

For this lesson, the students were working in groups of threes and fours. Following the Kagan principles, they were involved in **cooperative learning**, taking turns monitoring each other's performance and doing estimation together. Mr. A was scoring each group's performance during the lesson, using a whiteboard as a large scoreboard, with three criteria: behaviour, finished product and teamwork. The emphasis on collaborative and co-operative learning is strong in St. Luke's school ethos. The students worked hard and took turns in both the practical elements of the lesson, as well as the weighing, measuring and estimation work of the maths element of the lesson. They challenged each other on seeing who could most closely guess the correct measure of ingredients, and finally produced some tasty yule logs, which they shared proudly with our research team to have with our mid-afternoon cup of tea.

So, to summarise the key elements of St. Luke's approach to dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning:

- the importance of **basic dyslexia awareness training** followed by **further training on adopting dyslexia-friendly teaching and learning** approaches;
- **ongoing support from a specialist-trained mentor**, especially for less confident staff, including opportunities for **team teaching and joint reflection upon practice**;
- a **theme / topic- based approach to teaching the curriculum**, including **consulting students on pursuing lines of enquiry** which hooked their interests;
- linked to this, using **opportunities to design inter-subject lessons** (e.g. maths and geography);
- the use of **multisensory teaching and learning methods** across the curriculum;
- the need to **support students' organisational and sequencing skills**, as well as literacy skills;
- use of the **classroom's physical environment as a teaching and learning tool**, including use of learning walls;
- **extensive use of group work** as a vehicle for **cooperative learning** to increase engagement and confidence;
- **fostering student feedback** about their learning journeys and the **teaching of metacognitive strategies**, especially to develop independence;
- an **awareness of the importance of the emotional climate of the classroom** and support for students to recognise and manage their emotional states.

4. Students' and Parents' Views

We interviewed two students in a paired interview: Skye in Year 8 and Francesca in Year 10. We also conducted an individual interview with Francesca's mother, Mrs Spicer-Thornton.

Student interview

Both the students were very positive about being at St Luke's. When asked for a little more information about what they enjoyed, Skye volunteered:

"I like art and I like writing comics and... I don't know how to pronounce it. I like to draw. I like the ones from China, Hong Kong."

Skye also told us that she enjoyed writing horror stories. She explained delightedly:

"My grandad came to this school and he was expecting a nice, happy story, but when he heard that I wrote a horror story, his face just dropped!"

Francesca, on the other hand, preferred aspects of learning outside the classroom. She explained that she likes doing gardening and growing things. She also enjoyed looking after the goats that belong to the school. These are some of the wide range of animals kept both indoors and outdoors at St. Luke's. The children get many opportunities to observe and look after the animals, which are seen as a source for developing their nurturing skills, as well as for developing aspects of their scientific understanding of the natural world.

When asked what they found difficult at school, both girls, not unexpectedly, mentioned reading and spelling. However, they were able to explain an understanding of what dyslexia was and even its cognitive aspects.

When asked about what they did in their break times, both girls noted that they appreciated the fact that there were many 'quiet areas' around the school where they could relax with friends or just on their own. Francesca said she enjoyed playing on the swings:

"Apparently, I have a short memory loss, a teensy bit. That's what my dad says, anyway." (Skye)

In writing, Skye was able to put dots under words where she was unsure of the spelling and the teacher would give her the correct spellings on a whiteboard. She also noted the extra reading support lesson that she could access.

Skye also noted that if she got stuck with spellings for homework, that she could contact friends via the social medium of Facetime.

Francesca found using a reading ruler in lessons very good for reading tasks (see Figure 15). She said that she could get help from friends, teachers or her parents if she got stuck on literacy tasks.

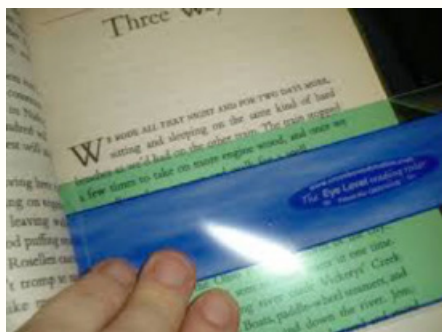


Figure 15: a reading ruler

In addition to practical support for learning, the girls were aware of the 'softer skills' that would help them, for example, the sessions on movement and relaxation that they undertook as part of the 'Healthy Minds' initiative at St. Luke's.

Project leader, Irene, in a follow-up email response to an enquiry about this, explained:

"As a whole staff, we always work with the pupils on self-awareness to support them in developing their self-confidence to reach their full potential, so we do support growth mind-set ethos, particularly with developing their resilience."

When asked about the future, Skye said that she wanted to be a singer or to work with children. She does weekly singing lessons and has even sung semi-professionally at a local pub.

Francesca wants to work with animals and her Year 10 work experience has been arranged for her to work at a local dog kennels.

Parent interview

In the interview with Francesca's mother, Mrs Spicer-Thornton explained that she had been made aware of the dyslexia-friendly school initiative through the school's newsletter. The project had also been discussed with parents in one of the termly 'tutorial days' meeting with teachers.

Mrs Spicer-Thornton also acknowledged the keenness of the school to get parents involved:

"Mrs Leach is the lead and we were encouraged to get involved in terms of having workshops in the school."

When asked about the content of the workshops, she explained:

"It was really an introduction to dyslexia, and there was like myths around dyslexia. We also explored other co-existing conditions such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia... so all the 'dys-s' really!"

When asked about whether the training had given practical advice for supporting your child at home, Mrs Spicer-Thornton was positive:

"Yes, it did. Francesca tends to be a sight reader, so the decoding is troublesome for her and phonics are troublesome for her. And so, the school's message is that accepting that some children learn differently and it's OK to be flexible about that... phonics doesn't work for everybody."

We asked Mrs Spicer-Thornton about the quality of communication with the school. She mentioned the weekly newsletter that the school sends out to parents, she also mentioned other channels of communication:

"We've got tutorials, which are quite in depth, at least sort of half an hour, though for some you can be in and out in 10 minutes... So, we have three tutorials a year and you've always got access to tutors... and the children have a home-school diary as well... So, the communication... I think because a lot of the children here have difficulties with communication, I think the school's geared up to make sure that the parents are informed."

When asked about parent voice being heard, Mrs Spicer-Thornton was equally positive:

“Yes, I mean it’s a two-way conversation really. It’s got to be a two-way conversation. Knowing how the school are supporting your children, or child in my case, and then being able to give feedback on that is really useful.”

“The school have been good at saying, you know, ‘I think Francesca will benefit from this... if you got the iPad you can use apps’... and she has got an iPad now... it’s that kind of thing, really. It’s just generally good two-way communication.”

When asked if participating in the project had changed her understanding of dyslexia, Mrs Spicer-Thornton explained:

“I think it’s widened my understanding of it. In terms of other sorts of co-existing conditions like dyscalculia or dysgraphia... I’d say in some ways it’s a spectrum in the same way you have autistic spectrum. Dyslexia is a spectrum and it has co-existing conditions with it... I think that’s good to know.”

Mrs Spicer-Thornton went on to explain how an individual profile had strengths and weaknesses and how important it is to ‘embrace the positives’:

“My son also has dyslexia and he’s struggled academically at times, but then it’s also embracing that he’s a really good problem-solver, he’s got fantastic spatial skills, he’s a really good footballer... And so, it’s just trying to find... everyone’s got something and it’s just trying to keep their confidence up with it, really.”

When asked if she had noticed changes in the staff as a result of the dyslexia-friendly school project, Mrs Spicer-Thornton noted widespread changes:

“Yes, I’ve thought about this. The dyslexia-friendly approach is kind of embedded in the curriculum now. I think it’s filtered through to the school now to realise that even if children don’t have a diagnosis of dyslexia they may have literacy difficulties that exhibit dyslexic tendencies. So, embedding that literacy approach throughout the school so that it covers all children, I think is really important... You know, it’s inclusive, isn’t it? Rather than shunting the dyslexic children off into one form of literacy, I think that having inclusivity is really important, and it works for everybody doesn’t it, that way?”

When asked whether she had noticed changes in her daughter as a result of the dyslexia-friendly school project, Mrs Spicer-Thornton noted Francesca's improved confidence and self-esteem:

"She will look up in the TV magazine now what programmes she wants and she'll read the paper, you know the children's newspaper 'First News': it comes out weekly. Francesca reads quite slowly but she can digest that, and it makes her feel so grown up - she's 15 in March and she's got her newspaper. So, yeah, that's very good."

When asked how the project gains can be maintained, Mrs Spicer-Thornton was clear:

"It's got to be an ongoing commitment to communication, in terms of developing the project. The school population isn't static, so as new pupils move through, they'll pick up the ethos, won't they? It's a dynamic, isn't it?"

So, in summary, the students expressed great satisfaction in being at St. Luke's because:

- they had **opportunities to pursue their passionate interests**, for example creative writing or working with animals, **within the school day**;
- they knew **how to access support for their literacy difficulties**;
- they could **access places around the school that were quiet and calm to relax** in their free time;
- they were **gaining understanding of themselves as learners**;
- they were **gaining opportunities to develop their emotional literacy**.

For our parent participants, important aspects of the dyslexia-friendly school project were:

- **being involved in the project from its outset**;
- **having training** to develop better understanding of the nature of dyslexia;
- getting **advice on how best to support their child practically** at home;
- getting **advice about useful resources** for learning;
- **good channels of communication** with the school, which were **two-way**;
- the important message to students and parents about **embracing and celebrating their child's strengths**;
- the **embedding of dyslexia-friendly practice** into **all aspects of the curriculum**;
- the clear **improvements in their child's literacy skills** and the positive effects on their child's **confidence and self-esteem**.

5. Conclusions

St. Luke's approach to developing a dyslexia-friendly school has been a holistic one. With a project leader with the requisite expertise, such as Irene, and a supportive SMT, St. Luke's has offered extensive and ongoing training to both staff and parents to help the project thrive. This has paid off in terms of staff confidence in supporting learners with dyslexia across the curriculum, and in terms of parents' feelings of being a practical part of the project, gaining expertise of their own in supporting their children.

St. Luke's has not only embraced a dyslexia-friendly pedagogy but seeks to develop the whole child in dealing with the social and emotional aspects of learning. It is committed to nurturing each child and to develop what the educationalist, Dr Thomas Armstrong, calls 'positive niche construction', where each child is supported as an individual, their personal passions fostered, and their strengths celebrated.

The background image shows a classroom setting. A female teacher with curly hair, wearing a red cardigan over a black top and a patterned skirt, stands on the left, looking towards a whiteboard. Two male students are in the foreground, facing the whiteboard. One student, wearing a grey sweater, is writing the word 'paint' on the board with a blue marker. Another student, wearing a white shirt, is also writing on the board. The whiteboard has several instances of the word 'paint' written on it. In the background, there are colorful educational charts or posters on the wall. The overall scene is brightly lit and focused on a learning activity.

Case Study 4

Frewen College

1. Background to the Case Study

Frewen College is a school that specialises in teaching children between the age of 7 and 19 years, who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and speech, language and communication needs. It is situated in Rye, Sussex. The college consists of a prep school, a senior school and a sixth form, which is run in conjunction with partnership colleges. The number on roll currently is 88, with 15 of these in the prep school. Pupils at KS3 follow a curriculum that is based on the National Curriculum. At KS4, pupils study English, mathematics and science, alongside four optional subjects, and may take up to 8 GCSEs. Students can attend as day or as boarding pupils (from the age of 9). Additional specialist support is available from Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Physiotherapy, as well as specialist 1:1 literacy and numeracy sessions. The level of support is determined by the pupil's Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or, if there is no EHCP, then it is agreed during assessment and evaluation of the learner. Around 70 members of staff are employed at the college.

2. Leadership and Management


Ofsted (2016) reported that leadership and management at Frewen College is good and that the principal is ably supported by other senior leaders, governors and subject leaders in ensuring that pupils receive the education and support they need. Aspects that might lead to the school becoming an 'outstanding' school were identified as creating further opportunities for promoting language, ensuring stakeholders pull together under the same vision for improvement, and making better use of best practice in the school to improve provision overall. Interviews with the principal and vice-principal (as well as lesson observations conducted) showed that work is well underway in developing the areas identified by Ofsted.

Several factors were identified by the principal as being important in both the success the school has had in recent years, and in improving provision going forwards. These included having teachers who:

- can empathise with the students;
- want to help struggling learners;
- can enable students to access the curriculum;
- have a good knowledge and understanding of dyslexia;
- are good teachers of all children;
- are trained in strategies that support children with dyslexia;
- are creative and innovative in their teaching.

Some teachers have previous experience of supporting children with special educational needs in mainstream schools; others have come from special schools where they have had experience of meeting an even wider range of needs; and some have children themselves with dyslexia. All the staff in the school are trained to level 3 in meeting the needs of learners with dyslexia, having taken a five day British Dyslexia Association (BDA) course. One teacher is trained at level 7 (Master's degree) and another has asked to do a level 5 course. Any new members of staff are given the level 3 training within their first year and are mentored by the head of department.

Another factor mentioned by the principal was that, although the governors appointed him because of his experience in mainstream and of managing other types of schools (as opposed to someone from a special school background), he has also done dyslexia training and feels able to ensure that the students are supported appropriately without them feeling that they are in a special school. He feels there is a much clearer vision now of what they want the school to be than when he was appointed three years ago. He decided then that he wanted the school to become a centre of excellence for dyslexia and that all staff had to be trained in strategies that worked so that children with dyslexia can start to learn.



Training in dyslexia is ongoing at Frewen College and often based on topics that the teachers themselves have asked for, e.g. sensory needs, speech and language. The principal draws upon the expertise he has amongst health care professionals, such as Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists, to train staff in techniques they can draw upon in the classroom. The college also has a role within the wider community, offering places on INSET days to schools within the Rye consortium. A number of teachers from local primary schools attended the 5 day BDA training course at the college last year. They also had a fairly large uptake (50-60 people) from SENCos and Heads of local schools for the one day training event last year, and this has increased understanding of dyslexia and knowledge of teaching strategies amongst mainstream teachers.

The staff at Frewen College also have the opportunity to develop their practice via peer observations, and the senior management team have recently been reviewing the way observations are recorded. They want to move away from the traditional format they used previously to one that evaluates how many of the techniques and strategies staff have been trained to use are now being implemented in lessons on a regular basis so that they become embedded in the curriculum. They have developed a new observation sheet which they are about to trial. It takes into account the possibility of co-existing specific learning differences and lists strategies such as:

- dyslexia-friendly worksheets and resources used;
- long distance work limited – no far copying;
- mini whiteboards provided for copying tasks;
- multisensory opportunities;
- extended reading / writing opportunities in pupil's books (learning scaffolded);
- movement breaks and frequent change of activities where needed;
- key words displayed and practice given at using them in context;
- differentiated questioning used;
- thinking time given;
- use of cued articulation where appropriate;
- concrete examples provided if needed;
- a range of representations of the same concept given in mathematics lessons;
- opportunities for pupil voice evident.

While not expecting teachers to use all the strategies in every lesson, the principal and vice principal do expect to see some of them in place. They pointed out that all staff have received Elkland speech and language training in the past 12 months, as well as the level 3 dyslexia training, and they are now at the point of encouraging people to share and use these strategies. There are opportunities for feedback after a lesson observation, during which other possible teaching strategies can be discussed and suggested. The vice principal noted how teachers coming from mainstream schools very quickly change the way they teach once they receive training. He gave an example of the ICT teacher who has started to slow down the pace, chunk information, adapt materials and presentation, individualise lessons and change the way she talks to pupils and parents. He also spoke about anti-bullying training he had recently delivered, which the staff had engaged in with enthusiasm. This was seen as important because so many of the children had been bullied at their previous school.

The principal explained that pupils who attend Frewen College are often performing well below age expectations, lack confidence and have low self-esteem. Sometimes they have been out of education and have either been home schooled or have become 'school refusers'. By the time they arrive at the college, students already see themselves as failures, and a priority is to enable them to 'feel good about themselves again'. This is achieved partly through pastoral care, but also through the understanding they receive from other students, the friendliness of the teachers, and a curriculum that offers **opportunities to study subjects (or take part in activities) they enjoy and can excel in**, e.g. art, sports, learning a musical instrument, taking part in concerts, etc. **Student voice is also encouraged**. They have an official platform through meetings run by the Head of Sixth Form, attended by about a quarter of the school, but the students feel comfortable in putting forward their ideas at any time.

Assemblies are another way of expressing student voice. There are three assemblies per week, one of which is a student assembly in which the particular year group chooses the topic for discussion. **An open-door policy** is operated and parents, as well as students, are involved in decisions, such as setting homework. The principal explained that, after listening to the students, it was decided to limit homework to 20 minutes per night from KS3 (just enough to show what they can do without tiring them after a long day), with a whole week to complete it to allow planning time.

Parents find staff at the school very approachable. The vice principal pointed out that many parents find the process of applying for an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) very stressful and that the school supports them through this. They **communicate with parents on a weekly basis** about different topics. Currently it was Access Arrangements for the mock exams that were under discussion. Parents also emailed the school on a regular basis with questions or for reassurance. The training teachers receive and the commitment they have to the pupils not only enables them to offer reassurance, but are also key factors in the success of the school. The only factor that was considered to act as a 'block' to their success was the length of time it takes the LA to make a decision about placing a child there and the 'battle' that parents and school often have with the LA before funding is found.

3. Developing Dyslexia-Friendly Teaching and Learning at Frewen College

To find out more about how a school that specialises in teaching learners with dyslexia achieves success, two members of staff were interviewed: the Head of Sixth Form (Hazel) and an Occupational Therapist (Nikki). They confirmed that **every new member of staff goes through the five day training** and that **peer observation** also takes place. They mentioned that they have 'gap students' who come to the school for a year and that they also receive training. This is supported by regular INSET, such as 'cued articulation' to help develop phonic skills and, more recently, 'assistive technology'. As the students at Frewen College undergo assessment / evaluation before starting there, speech therapy and occupational therapy are already on their personal learning plan. Writing and typing speed are examined and keyboard skills are taught.

Both members of staff felt that their experience at Frewen was different to mainstream. Nikki explained that she had only worked with children with dyspraxia, motor difficulties or physical difficulties in mainstream, and so working in a school for children with dyslexia was a big change. Hazel said that a large proportion of the children she worked with in mainstream had a statement or were on school action plus, but even so the support (training) was not really formalised, it was more a matter of 'learning on the job'. Hazel appreciated the formal training given by the school and recognised what other professionals such as Nikki could offer.

She noted that small things, like the introduction of wobble cushions, fiddle toys and blu tack, had made a big difference to pupil concentration. She also mentioned the importance of assessment, particularly as so many of the students had more than one specific learning difference. Handwriting and visual perception are assessed, visual sequential memory, and form constancy, as well as screening for visual stress. The thing that they felt made the biggest impact, though, was **supporting the students' emotional needs**. They discussed 'how damaged some of the children are' when they arrived and how they needed to spend the first term confidence building:

"We are not going to make much progress in those first few weeks, but just getting them to think 'I can learn' and to see them walk into a classroom with a smile and to hear their parents say 'for the first time he's actually said 'when am I going back to school?' at the end of the Christmas holidays ... and 'can I have some homework please?'"

They reported that a **collaborative approach** is used in supporting students; staff work together to 'unpack their difficulties' and this raises awareness of how complex dyslexia is. They noted that mainstream teachers often have the perception that dyslexia is just about being unable to read or write neatly or get their work done in time. There is a lack of understanding of other processing difficulties, such as working memory or processing speed, and that some pupils with dyslexia can decode quite well but do not understand what they have read. Hazel said that many of the files she receives for potential sixth form students indicate poor working memory and slow processing speed, and that slightly **slowing down the rate of presentation of information** can make a big difference.

They also felt that many strategies benefitted all learners, in particular, vocabulary teaching and cued articulation, whilst others, e.g. touch typing, were really powerful for some students but not right for everyone (as some learners with dyspraxia struggle to learn keyboard skills). **Flexibility** was mentioned and the ability to **adapt resources and lessons** to meet a range of needs. This was seen as very important as a lot of students had been 'refusers' at their previous school and yet a large number of them were now exceeding their target grades because now they know how to learn. They not only make progress academically but also in their personal and emotional intelligence. Hazel confirmed that students have the opportunity to air their views at the student council, which is held once a fortnight, but also that they feel they can approach staff over lunch to discuss issues and that 'there is always someone around'.

Parents are kept fully informed of their child's progress and of school activities through three formal school reports per year, parents' evening, the school newsletter (published every half-term), and through **regular tutor contact**. Some parents in the senior school email two or three times per week and they are always responded to, but in the sixth form many parents 'step back' as they have been fighting for support for a long time and now that they feel their son / daughter is in the right place they are less anxious. Hazel and Nikki both expressed the view that the greater the contact with parents, the easier it made life as they know the kind of things that might upset the student, what might be a trigger, what they struggle with, and so strategies are automatically put in place. By being proactive they can 'manage anxieties'.

Multi-agency meetings are held where strategies can be shared with the school and become embedded in the curriculum. They mentioned the new observation proforma discussed in the senior management interview and how this would further ensure that support strategies are embedded. Also, that training helped to raise the expectations of teachers. They considered that the other main factors contributing to their success were:

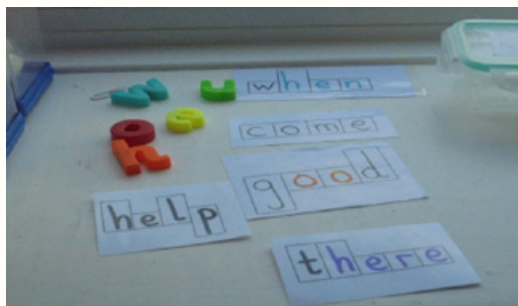
- staff that are caring;
- the high level of commitment;
- having individual knowledge of the students;
- therapy available on site;
- advice and information readily available;
- liaison with outside agencies (a strength).

The only 'barriers' to success that were mentioned were 'time' and the 'emotional difficulties' that the children came with. Mental health problems had to come first and so sometimes other professionals needed to take a step back. While a lot of the students 'buy into' the approaches used right away, for others it can take a lot longer. However, in most cases this is overcome during their first term at the school.

There was the opportunity during the visit to see dyslexia-friendly strategies in action through two lesson observations, a reading walk, and a short visit to a literacy lesson.

Literacy Lesson (Prep School)

A number of resources and strategies were being used effectively to support children at KS2 with reading and writing skills. A unit with alphabet drawers stored plastic letters that one pupil was sorting through in order to match them to word shapes on flash cards before reading them aloud.



Word shapes

Clear plastic stands were used for books and worksheets and placed directly in front of the learner (rather than to the side) in order to facilitate reading or the copying of information.



Reading book on stand

Individual targets for writing were set for each pupil and the success criteria were glued into the child's exercise book. In the example below, each sentence written by the pupil had to have a capital letter, a question mark, and a targeted correct spelling. Each sentence had to have a different question word. An example sentence was provided and colour coded to match the success criteria with the capital letter written in green, the question word in blue, the question mark in purple, and the targeted spelling in red. The learner used this to model further questions, thus **learning was scaffolded**.

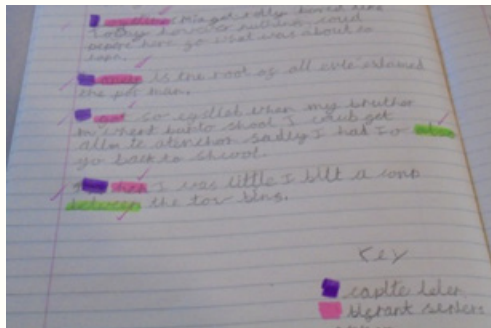
Success criteria:

Capital letter	1
Question mark	1
Targeted spelling correct	1
Use a different question word at the beginning of each sentence	1

What is the **difference** between an apple and a pear?

Success criteria for writing sentences

This approach was extended with some pupils to develop proof-reading skills. They checked the sentences they had written for correct punctuation and grammar, and, as they did so, highlighted the words with highlighter pens of the same colour as the key (see example below).

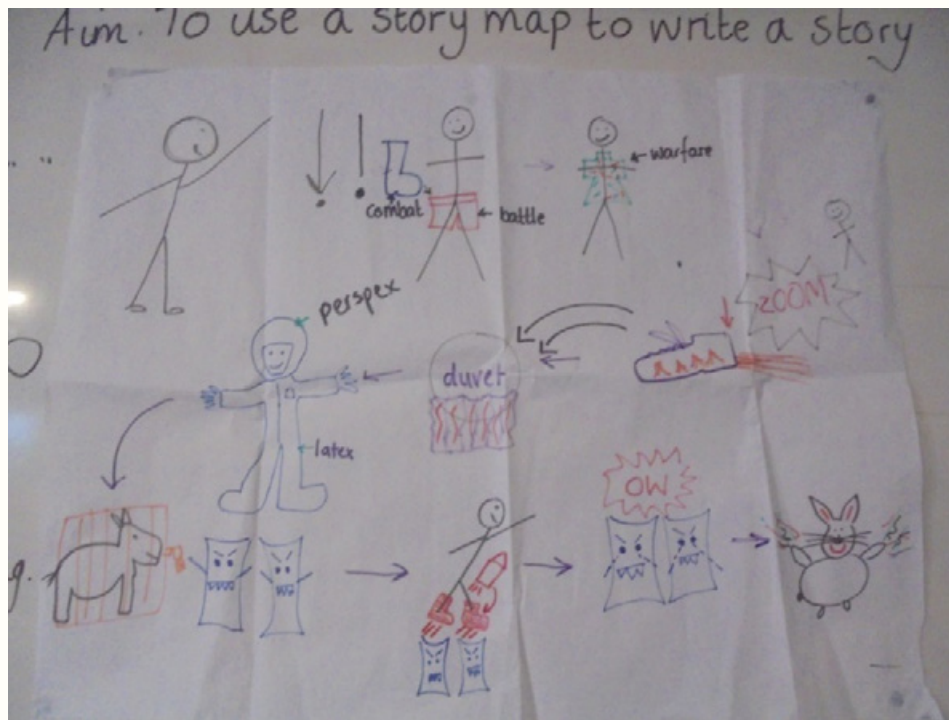


Proof-reading sentences

The teacher used a reward system of 'marbles in a jar' to motivate the pupils. If success criteria were met, the child was given a marble to place in the jar, and when it was full they received a negotiated reward.

Talk for Learning (Prep School)

The first lesson observation was a structured language lesson with a Year 4 and 5 class and provided background to the teaching observed in the senior school later in the day. The class had been working on a story called 'Traction Man'. The lesson started by the class telling the story using a 'story map' as a visual stimulus. The story map consisted of 16 hand drawn pictures on a large sheet of paper pinned to the wall. The pictures supported working memory while the children re-told the story, performing actions at the same time to reinforce understanding. The teacher then split it up for individual children to tell a section of the story. The vocabulary used (e.g. captive) was discussed.



Story Map showing first eight pictures for 'Traction Man'

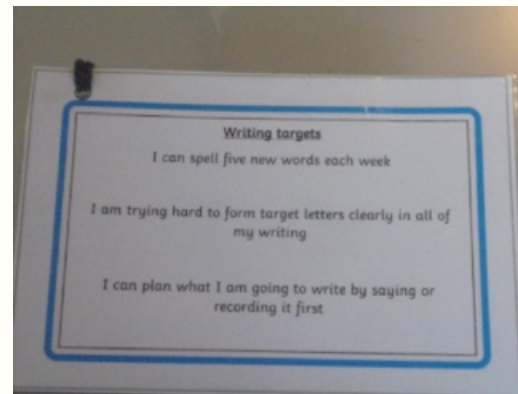
Following the oral telling of the story, the class were given **differentiated writing tasks** to do. Some were asked to write the first few sentences of the story using the story map on the wall. Before starting the task, the teacher discussed what she would be looking for, e.g. punctuation, finger spaces. She asked the children what they could do if they were not sure how to spell a word. One child suggested sounding it out, looking it up in a dictionary or checking if the word was written on the story map. Others in the class were given sentence strips to arrange in the right order and then glue into their exercise book. Symbols from Widgit online were used to support the reading of the sentence strips. Once the story had been re-created using the sentence strips, the pupils read it back to the teacher before completing a worksheet (closure exercise) by writing missing words into sentences. One child in the group was given sentence strips and asked to cut them up into individual words before rearranging them in the correct order. He was supported by a teaching assistant.

Sloped plastic desks were used for exercise books and worksheets and each child had individual writing targets on a card. For example:

- I can spell five new words each week.
- I am trying hard to form target letters clearly in all my writing.
- I can plan what I am going to write by saying or recording it first.



Sloping desk used for books and worksheets

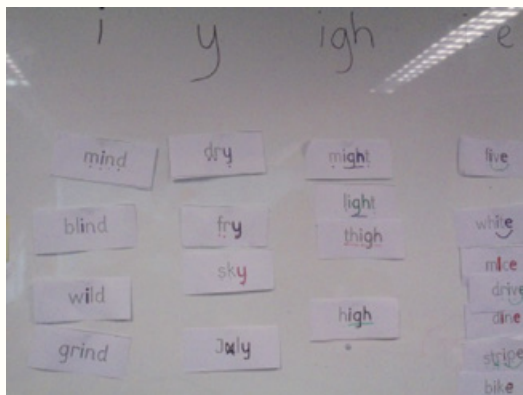


Card with individual pupil writing targets

The lesson contained many opportunities for overlearning vocabulary, sight words, and spelling of target words.

Phonics Lesson (Senior School)

The second observation was of a structured phonics lesson with a Year 8 class, which again contained many opportunities for overlearning. The aim of the lesson was to reinforce four different spelling choices for long vowel sound /i/: i, i-e, igh, y. The lesson started with discovery learning. Each pupil was given a set of cards with words containing long 'i' sound and asked to trace over the letters that made the /i/ sound with felt pens. They were taught to use a strategy of sounding out and touching their arm to isolate the sounds first. For example, the word 'sky' was split into the three sounds /s/ /k/ /i/ by the pupil saying the word slowly and tapping their arm as they articulated each sound. This was followed by a group activity where students used blu tack to stick words on the board in columns under four choices (i, y, igh, i-e) for phoneme /i/. The spelling choices were reinforced again by asking them to underline the section that made the /i/ sound. They then copied the words from the cards onto their individual white boards before completing a worksheet. Each worksheet had a number of pictures and words next to them with the vowels missing e.g. b-k- (bike) which the pupils completed.



Sorting activity on board for /i/ words



Phonic chart used to support spelling

These spellings were then generalised by asking the students to write (spell) words containing the same vowel combinations on their individual white boards but using different words to those sorted earlier, e.g. 'mime' instead of 'bike'. A large chart was available on the wall for reference showing the 44 sounds in the English language with a section in green showing possible spelling choices for long vowel sounds. (The exercise highlighted some auditory discrimination problems in one student who had the correct vowel combination but made an error in the consonant used).

The spelling choices were reinforced again through a Bingo game. Each student was given a sheet with around twenty words on it. They had to choose five words to circle as their target words for the game. The teacher gave the sounds in each word and the pupil had to blend them and then check if the word was circled on their sheet. The winner had to sound out his five words one at a time by tapping them on his arm for the teacher to check, reinforcing ability to encode as well as decode words. The final activity (plenary) was to write a 'silly sentence' using as many /i/ words as possible on individual whiteboards. The person with the longest sentence read it out to the whole class. The students enjoyed the competitive element of this challenge.

Towards the end of the lesson one student arrived who had been out of class working on an oral presentation in preparation for public speaking exams. Students take these exams during KS3, starting with the telling of a story they have read in Year 7, a talk on an experience in Year 8, leading up to a talk about an object (a more challenging task) in Year 9. This Year 8 pupil was preparing to give a talk on a holiday he had been on at Butlins, using a series of photographs to support memory.

Lessons in the senior school have a number of elements in common with those observed in the prep school: **an emphasis on oral skills, learning is scaffolded, multisensory methods are employed, and there is good individualisation of work.**

Reading Walk (Senior School)

Later in the day there was an opportunity to take a tour of the senior school during a timetabled reading session. The afternoon started with all classes having a reading slot. During this tour, several different types of reading activities were observed:

- **use of stories** to develop reading comprehension and the ability to draw inferences (supported by a TA);
- reading of **fictional and non-fiction texts**, both independently and to the teacher;
- reading pages from science text books (class in science lab);
- **developing study skills** by reading exam questions, highlighting key information-carrying words and then calculating the answers (science examination paper).


4. Students' and Parents' Views

Students' views (Senior School / Sixth Form)

Two students were interviewed as a pair. Grace is a year 13 student studying 'A' levels and Louis is a Year 7 student who is new to the school. Grace's favourite subject is art. She is not keen on English and mathematics but says that 'it's a lot, lot, lot better here than it was in my old school'. She felt that there was less pressure at Frewen College, more support and that the teachers were 'tuned in' more to her way of thinking. Art was a favourite subject for Louis too, alongside design technology and science. He also was not keen on English and mathematics. He said that he found it difficult to learn times tables and remember number facts.


Louis and Grace had both had negative experiences at their previous schools. Grace transferred to Frewen in Year 10 and has been there for almost three years. She is more confident now and likes the school because 'everyone understands each other, there is no bullying or making fun of people, and it has a calm, relaxed atmosphere'. Louis too is happier at Frewen College; he likes the smaller classes and the quieter environment. He described it as 'a breath of fresh air'. Both students were aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Louis likes inventing things and has made a rocket in art that he is going to put an engine in to see if it can fly. Grace likes drawing and socialising.

When asked what their dyslexia meant to them it drew emotional responses. Grace told me that she thought at first that dyslexia was a disease and that she had hoped it would go away. She discussed how a few years ago she hated the word and would not say it. She could see no good in it – it was all 'doom and gloom'. She described a lack of awareness amongst students and staff in mainstream schools, saying that the other students did not understand it and would run away from her, not talk to her, and refuse to work in a pair with her because her 'handwriting was messy and spelling wasn't great', and often TAs supporting her would make rude comments. Teachers told her that she would not pass any GCSEs and that affected her self-esteem.



Her view of dyslexia has changed, however, since attending Frewen College. She recognises that learners with dyslexia often have a different way of thinking about things and that they can have good ideas. At her current school, no-one is worried about her dyslexia and she has no problems finding a partner to work with. Neither is there a need to explain her difficulties to her peers as they all understand them. She feels that English and mathematics are still ‘a bit of a stumbling block’, though. Louis expressed similar views, saying that he too had thought it was a disease and that he was quite scared. He had been bullied at his previous school, was often in detention for not doing homework or losing things, and became a school refuser. Louis described how he felt at his previous school when he was asked to read aloud in class, how he would start to sweat, and other pupils would laugh at him, but here ‘everyone is equal’ and that helps.

Grace described ways in which teachers at Frewen support her. These include:

- understanding her needs;
 - reading things out to her;
 - putting work on coloured paper;
 - breaking work down into small steps;
 - going over things several times with her;
 - structuring work or assignments;
 - giving thinking time;
 - use of visuals to support memory and organisational skills;
 - allowing preparation time;
 - not being made to feel different;
 - teaching exam techniques, e.g. highlighting key information carrying words;
 - study skills support, e.g. writing a CV;
 - homework details glued into homework diary (no copying from a board);
 - weekly mentoring sessions.
- 

Louis had also been taught how to highlight key words in exam questions during his science lessons. His teachers use visuals to support reading and he has been given a timetable with pictures on it so that it does not matter if he cannot read all the words. Both students said they find the resource boxes in classrooms helpful, too, e.g. dictaphones for recording things they might forget and wobble cushions to aid concentration. In addition, Louis had been provided with a pillow when sitting on a hard chair to help him to concentrate better. He could not believe, he said, how quickly the time went at Frewen College. He had been there for a few months now but it felt like it was 'only yesterday' that he started, whereas at his previous school 'a week felt like a whole term'. He felt that he benefitted from the single lessons and more frequent breaks and stated that he had 'good vibes' about Frewen right from his first visit.

Students' views (Prep School)

Two pupils from the prep school (a boy and a girl) were interviewed as a pair. They were asked what their favourite subjects at school are. Ollie likes art and mathematics and says that he likes 'playing with numbers'. Chloe likes literacy and art but particularly likes writing stories. Neither child could identify a least favourite subject as they thought that all the lessons were fun. They talked about a number of things that they preferred at Frewen College to their previous (mainstream) school, including three breaks per day instead of two. They both mentioned how wobble cushions helped them to concentrate and also that they often fiddled with their shoes in lessons and so the teachers let them take their shoes off, whereas they had got in trouble for it at their previous school. They said that 'stretchy rubber bands' which they put around their chair to fiddle with also helped their concentration and made no noise so that they did not distract other people. Working slopes and 'special pencils' helped them with writing and they both have support from the Occupational Therapist. Chloe enjoys literacy lessons and finds the story maps helpful.


When asked if there was anything at their current school that could be improved, the only thing they could think of was to put a water fountain in the playground so that they could get drinks at break. No ideas for changes to lessons were offered as they both said that the lessons were 'perfect'. They also said that the school was very friendly and that the teachers give you a lot of respect. Ollie described it as a 'mini-family'.

The children were asked if they had heard the word 'dyslexia'. This again brought emotional responses. Ollie viewed it very negatively, saying it was a 'bad word' because it meant that you could not read or write. Chloe knew that it could mean that you think differently and learn differently. In terms of the future, Ollie would like to be a 'dyslexia tutor' so that he can help other children and Chloe would like to be an author.

Parents' views


Two mothers of children from the prep school were interviewed. They reported that they found out about Frewen College from a list of CReSTeD approved schools (Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils) which helps parents to choose a school for children with specific learning differences. Both mothers wanted a school where they would get dyslexia-friendly teaching every lesson rather than a unit attached to a mainstream school. The particular attraction of this was that the children did not have to be withdrawn to receive appropriate teaching. They felt that teachers had more time for parents at Frewen and they could talk to them any time (open door policy) but noted also that a greater amount of time was allocated at the termly parents' evenings (40 minutes instead of 10 minutes) as 'parents of children with special educational needs require more time than is normally available at parents' evenings in mainstream schools'. They acknowledged that most parents communicated with staff on a regular basis via email and said that there was a suggestions box too. However, they were not sure how often it was used as they felt that parents were generally very happy with the education their children received. They pointed out that the more confidence you have in the school, the less you need to make suggestions for improvement.

Both mothers were actively involved in the social aspects of the school. They were invited to training events, such as the one day conference held the previous year, and they were given ideas of activities they could do at home with their child. However, there is a 'no homework' policy for the younger children at Frewen as the school acknowledges that they are too tired at the end of the day. Instead they send home a pack of activities that parents can work on during the school holidays. One parent commented on how she had 'more hope for the future' since her child started at the school. The other agreed and added that it had changed her view of dyslexia; she now realises that it doesn't have to be something that will stand in her child's way, because at Frewen her daughter was 'getting the tools' to enable her to learn.



They both said that they now had happier, more contented children, which meant that their relationship with their child was more relaxed as they did not have to deal with ‘all the horrible stuff that happens as a result of having a very anxious child’. Their children were now in an environment in which they could thrive and that was reflected at home. One mother expressed the view that in mainstream school the lessons sometimes go over the child’s head, that classes are too big and the noise levels too high, and so a lot of the time her child came out of school ‘in a state of shock’.

The teachers at Frewen College were described by parents as ‘happy’ and that they ‘thoroughly enjoy their job’. They felt that staff know each child individually, can accommodate children by problem solving with them, and can take on board anything that is going on at home. They felt that a lot more thought went into the support their child received and that teaching was a lot more consistent. They had noticed that there was not a lot of movement of staff at Frewen and they were aware that all members of staff had undertaken dyslexia training, which meant that they could adapt approaches in the classroom to meet their child’s needs whilst still teaching the normal curriculum. Both parents explained that their child had had such negative experiences in mainstream education that they had moved counties to get their child into a school that they felt could meet their needs. One mother told me how her daughter’s reading had improved immensely since she started at the school and that she now had the confidence to ask people how to spell a word knowing that they would help her, whereas before she would have avoided reading and tried to hide her spelling difficulties. What made the difference, they felt, was that the children felt included all the time rather than taken out of class for extra help, and that class sizes were smaller than at their previous school with teachers trained in dyslexia. Their child was given extra attention, did not have to miss out on extracurricular activities, and did not have the same reliance on 1:1 support that they had in mainstream because all teachers knew how to enable them to learn. Parents acknowledged that easy access to speech therapy and occupational therapy also played a part in the improvements they had seen. They no longer had to take their child to appointments outside school, which had previously meant that they missed out on a lot of after school activities.



In summary:


- **staff training** was seen as a key element in the success of the school;
- senior management, teachers, pupils and parents all identified **empathy and understanding** the nature of dyslexia as important in supporting learners effectively;
- **supporting children's emotional needs** was seen as crucial, as so many of them had low self-esteem and effective learning could not take place until this improved;
- **respect** for pupils and the many opportunities given for '**pupil voice**' supported their emotional well-being;
- **flexibility and the ability to adapt** resources and lessons to meet a range of needs were seen as key to inclusion and in enabling children to learn;
- **multi-agency meetings** to share strategies aided the ability of staff to respond flexibly;
- **metacognition** – helping children to understand how to learn – was also a key element;
- **peer support** and **dyslexia awareness amongst other students** (not having to explain their difficulties to them) were important in providing emotional support;
- **good communication** between teachers and parents was seen as beneficial by both parties.

5. Conclusions

Frewen College is successful in ensuring that all stakeholders pull together and have the same vision of how learners with dyslexia can be effectively supported. All members of staff have received a minimum of five days BDA training in dyslexia, supplemented by regular INSET. Teaching is consistent across different phases in the use of multisensory approaches, vocabulary development, scaffolded learning, visuals to support working memory and individualisation of work. They have developed a culture in which children feel safe and can thrive. The college plays a role in raising awareness of dyslexia amongst teachers from local mainstream schools by offering places at conferences, training courses and INSET days.

Strategies and approaches observed in the prep school are easily transferable to mainstream primary schools and would benefit all children. Many of the approaches seen across phases could be adopted by mainstream secondary schools too, e.g. discussion of subject specific vocabulary, use of visuals to support working memory, giving more thinking and planning time, being prepared to repeat information if necessary, teaching study skills and exam techniques, structuring of tasks and assignments, setting individual targets for writing (attached to the inside of the student's exercise book), and having a resource box available with equipment to support individual needs. Other techniques observed in the Year 8 lesson could be adopted by teachers in the SEN Department at secondary level and included in phonics lessons in primary schools.

There appears to be insufficient consistent training amongst mainstream teachers in how to effectively meet the needs of struggling learners. The five day course run by the British Dyslexia Association and undertaken by all members of staff is a key element in the success of Frewen College and the achievements of the pupils. It would be beneficial if this could be rolled out to all mainstream teachers across the country as a basic part of their professional development. Perhaps a feasible way of doing this would be to make it mandatory for a member of the senior management team to attend the 5 day course (in the way that it is mandatory for SENCos to undertake training), for them to cascade it to all Heads of Departments (HoDs) in the school, and for the HoD to cascade it to all members of staff within their subject area.



The type of lesson observation sheet developed by Frewen College would appear to be an effective way of monitoring if strategies taught on training courses are used consistently across a school and have become embedded in the curriculum. For this to happen, it is likely that government funding would need to be made available.

Frewen College features in a [series of videos](#) highlighting effective dyslexia-friendly teaching practice, produced by the British Dyslexia Association as part of a Department for Education funded project, and available on the BDA YouTube channel.

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Further Reading

Hargreaves, S. (2012) Study Skills for Dyslexic Students. London: Sage

This book provides a chapter on understanding your preferred learning / thinking style as well as practical strategies for managing workload, answering essay questions, using ICT, structuring writing, improving reading, spelling and writing skills and exam techniques.

Packiam-Alloway, T. (2011) Improving Working Memory: Supporting Students' Learning. London: Sage.

This book discusses the impact of working memory difficulties on students with Specific Learning Differences and offers a range of practical strategies for supporting them in the classroom.

Reid, G. (2016) Dyslexia: A Practitioners' Handbook, 5th Edition. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Contains discussion of research into visual and temporal processing that offers an explanation for visual distortions and speed of processing difficulties experienced by some learners with dyslexia and the need to accommodate them by reducing glare (using coloured backgrounds), a slower rate of presentation and repetition of information.

Train the trainer: Teaching for Neurodiversity

www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/about/projects/dyslexia-spld-support-project-2016-17

Gives details of the one-day free training event and links to PowerPoints, teaching resources and webinars.

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