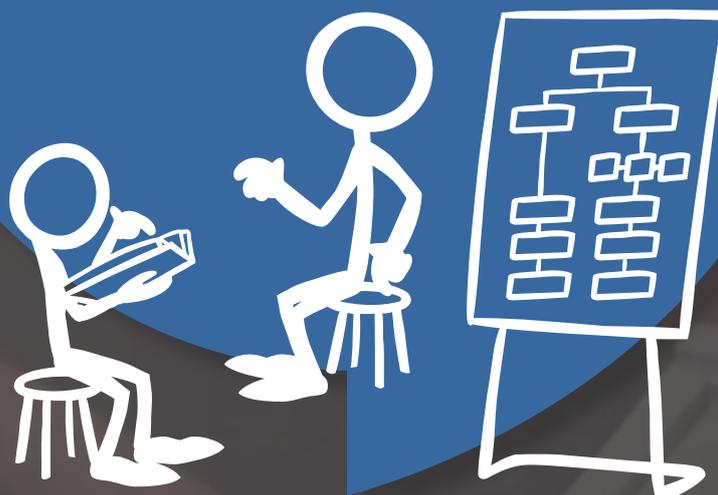


Support for Learning at Ellesmere



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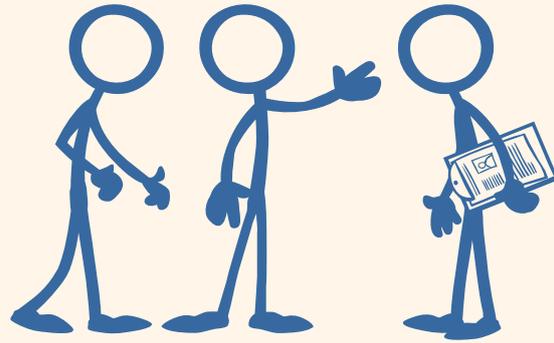


Department for Education

Ellesmere College is an independent day and boarding school of some 600 British and international students aged between 7 and 18. It is situated in the heart of rural Shropshire's Lakeland with a long tradition of educating students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) in a mainstream environment. Ellesmere is by no means a special school. It is however special. The aim is to value every single student equally and to relish the broad range of abilities encountered.

The historical nature of the strong support for students with dyslexia means the school is resourced with a strong SEN team.

The Support for Learning Department comprises seven qualified specialist teachers either level 5 or 7 SpLD. Ellesmere values the importance of continuing professional development. A wide range of skills and expertise is made available through the Support for Learning Department including a variety of methods, programmes and approaches; this aligns with the view that students' strengths are maximized and their weaknesses supported. The expertise of the specialist teacher is a fundamental quality underpinning the planning and implementation of the support arranged for each student.



As part of the process of deciding upon a school for their child, parents are invited to Open Days and other College events and importantly to book two taster days for their child. These give the opportunity for their son or daughter to join a class, experience life as an Ellesmerian and, for those who may have a learning difficulty, to spend an hour chatting and taking part in some basic observations and assessments and talking about interests and impressions of the school and generally having some focused individual time. The purpose of taster days for children is to form an impression of Ellesmere as a place in which they will feel secure but also challenged to aspire and enjoy learning. For the teachers the process of baseline testing begins and continues into the first term. These base line assessments are looked at in conjunction with existing assessment reports, which parents may provide from an educational psychologist or a specialist teacher. A recommendation is then made concerning how many support lessons in English or Maths support would be required.



One of the ways that a student's needs are prioritised is the replacement of language lessons between ages 7 and 13 in the Lower School with specialist support for English or Maths. This is offered as an option subject in Middle School at ages 13 – 16 and operates alongside A-levels or International Baccalaureate in Sixth Form at ages 16 - 18.

The student attends these lessons as part of an individualised timetable which may include music lessons, Tennis Academy lessons, a swimming team training package, membership of the Shooting Academy, alongside participating in the Arts Award, Combined Cadet Force activities, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme or being a member of the Green Team environmental group. Support lessons are seen very much as part of the deal and are therefore an integral part of a student's week. There is seldom any sense of stigma attached to support for these reasons; it is just another lesson and part of the fabric of a rich life at Ellesmere. This unquestioned integration is one of the strengths.

Regular specialist assessment is a feature of support at Ellesmere, whether during taster days or more fulsome investigation, in order to establish a learning plan for an individual during the first term or assessing annually for monitoring purposes.

In Year 7 the Dyslexia Portfolio is used with all students having support lessons to give some insight into their needs at the beginning of Key Stage 3 in order that programmes may be fine-tuned.

This includes the use of assistive technology, specialist programmes and equipment. For example, a student may have been introduced to touch typing in Year 6 and if it is envisaged that in order to function alongside peers, using a word processor may be essential, a greater emphasis is placed upon typing.

The suggestion may be made that where appropriate a student uses a laptop. Similarly, at the beginning of Year 7, it is possible to predict from assessments whether a student will need to be trained to use a scribe or voice recognition software, for example, Dragon NaturallySpeaking (which translates speech into type and can read back what is written), in order to produce appropriate work.

At these points emphasis may shift from structured spelling programmes to address particular dyslexia issues, towards using other tools which may be of greater benefit to the student across the curriculum.

A laptop with spell and grammar check and Dragon installed may at a point in the student's life be more helpful in preparing for independent study than continuing with a structured phonics spelling programme. Collaboration between the Support for Learning Department and the mainstream curriculum staff is regarded as essential in sharing good practice by providing advice and information that benefits each student. Decisions are made jointly, particularly for English and Maths, and with reference to the student's Period Grades (mainstream assessments) and subject work.

The continuous process; of assessment, review and re-evaluation to match the individual's readiness for the next stage of learning to the support available, is a strength. The responsiveness to change is crucial.





'Being at a school where nobody is treated differently because of their dyslexia has really helped me progress. Having had the opportunities to use a laptop and then move on to use Dragon dictator in exams has really advanced my grades and will really help me when I get to do my final GCSEs.'

Harry Williamson, Ellesmere Student and keen downhill mountain bike rider.

Students are routinely assessed for special arrangements towards the end of Year 9 in preparation for GCSE courses that have begun that year. While it is acknowledged that children with dyslexia rarely demonstrate consistent scores for tracking purposes rigorous monitoring and evaluation is built in to each student's personal plan. Data collection is regarded as a necessary part of teaching to ensure teaching matches the learning required. This is a further opportunity to ensure that the student's skills and tools for learning match needs. It is at this point in Year 9 when decisions are formalised into choosing to use, if appropriate, a reader, scribe, voice recognition software or a word processor so that arrangements are in place for external examinations. These continue to be reviewed on an individual basis as a student who requires a scribe for History may prefer to write in Maths. There is, therefore, constant communication with teachers and particularly the Examinations staff at Ellesmere. This flexible attention to individual need is another strength. As each student progresses through Key Stages 2 and 3 towards option choices for Key Stage 4, the support teachers work closely with subject teachers and tutors to guide the student towards the best choices at examination level. As Support for Learning is an optional choice in itself,

providing up to four potential support lessons, it may be felt that to aim at eight GCSE subjects with support is advisable (rather than nine without support). In this case the support teacher is acting in the multiple roles of mentor, study skills and revision teacher, as well as a specialist teacher, steering the student through the multiple demands of GCSE courses and the multiple potential of the support available. Students choosing between one and four support lessons will spend those non-taught sessions in the Centre. This is an independent study room equipped with eight computers, copier, printer, a range of books and individual work areas for private study where the student may choose to reinforce work covered in specialist lessons, revision, preparation, coursework or private reading. Some benefit from a balance between specialist support lessons and time to work on their studies. The emphasis is on supporting the student to achieve the best qualifications that they can whilst enjoying the experience and gaining important independence.

Regular team meetings within the Support for Learning Department ensure that good practice is shared and students' progress is monitored. It also provides the opportunity for specialists to share expertise and to exchange information to add value to their Continuing Professional Development. Alternative approaches are also explored such as movement and exercise programmes to open neural pathways in order to develop readiness for learning. The Department also has considerable experience in speech, language and communication needs and also Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's Syndrome and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. This demonstrates the importance attached to the fact that there are often co-occurring difficulties around dyslexia, and that dyslexia is seen as a continuum, as stated by Rose in 2009. As well as classes for English, Maths and curriculum support generally, there are classes supporting speech, language and communication difficulties and with personal and social communication skills. There is also The Exercise Programme which supports those with co-ordination issues and helps develop fine and gross motor skills. Often skills work is incorporated into specialist lessons routinely.



Screening is carried out within the team for various potential needs upon referral from teachers, parents, sometimes students themselves or from other members of the team. Formal referrals are made to external agencies if it is felt the student's needs are beyond the scope of the team and follow-up work is carried out upon their recommendations. Specialist assessment for dyslexia is carried out within the team. Close collaboration and involvement of parents and carers in the planning, implementation and monitoring of students' progress is seen as paramount. Individual Education Plans are regarded as live documents with input from a range of professionals and parents and carers. Parents and carers are also encouraged to engage with staff throughout the school year to ensure they feel fully involved in their child's programme.

The spirit of communication with the student at the centre exists beyond IEPs and informs the planning of non-specialist subject teachers, for example devising a visually appropriate worksheet in Physics for those with dyslexia or presenting notes using mind maps or PowerPoint presentations with backup slide notes. Sharing Assessment Focuses in English, learning objectives in Science, keywords and concepts in Religious Studies and topics in Maths are all part of teachers' shared vocabulary linking mainstream teaching with support lessons whether to reinforce, catch up with or extend learning.



The Accelerated Reading Programme established at Lower School with students from age 7 and used to age 13 in English lessons forms the basis of reading practice in support lessons. Discussion takes place about the suitability of books when necessary. Collaboration exists at every stage and extends to ensuring special arrangements for examinations are appropriate for each subject. The commitment from subject and support teachers with the student at the centre is a further strength.



The Support for Learning Department is named as such because it incorporates the notion of supporting the student in all learning at whatever stage the individual happens to be, whether this is phonics for decoding in the early stages of reading and encoding in spelling, or the skills of evaluating, synthesising and creating in the most advanced. Support for Learning is also a team of specialist teachers with the shared intent of helping students succeed at whatever level and grow into confident individuals who are 'willing to have a go' irrespective of any difficulty and to enable them to be more independent learners ready to engage alongside and in some cases beyond their peers. Support for Learning is a base classroom in Lower School, where students aged 7 – 13 have most lessons, and within the main body of College, a building shared with the English as an Additional Language Department which buzzes with British and international students going about their learning.



The Science lesson in which the boy with dyslexia sits on the front row with laptop and headset quietly dictating notes recorded by Dragon from the teacher who stands at the whiteboard teaching and visually demonstrating key points, is not unusual. Students working on controlled assessments and mock or external exams in quiet study rooms with their support teachers, is a common sight. A social area with water fountain for hydration so that their brains are alert, a team of sympathetic staff and fellow students also intent on learning combine in an overall sense of well-being and purposeful study support. Ellesmere's unique support systems are intended to ensure that no individual need will impair aspiration and success.

Contact us:

www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk

www.ellesmere.com



The individuals represented in these photographs are not models. The photographs were taken during Trust activities but individuals may not be involved in this specific work described and are used only to illustrate the case study.