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# Stop Asking Children to Adapt to the System: Inside Frewen College's Whole-School Approach to Dyslexia

Mark Loveday, Headmaster of Frewen College shares how the school teaches dyslexic students how to learn, not just what to learn.

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**M**any parents are told that their child's needs can be met through reasonable adjustments in a mainstream setting. For some children, this works well. For others, even with adjustments in place, learning remains exhausting, progress is slow and confidence begins to fade.

Families often arrive at a specialist dyslexia school after their child has tried hard, worked harder and still struggled. They want to understand what will be different. A balance between aspiration and self-belief.





At a specialist setting such as Frewen College, change does not come from a single intervention. It comes from a consistent, whole-school approach in which teaching, support and understanding are woven into everyday learning, creating an environment where students can rebuild confidence, make meaningful progress and experience learning differently.

## What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia has been recognised for nearly 150 years, first described in 1877 as “word blindness”. The term comes from Greek, meaning “difficulty with words”, and today it is thought to affect around 10% of the UK population. It is widely understood to have a genetic basis.

The 2025 Delphi Dyslexia Study defines dyslexia as “a set of processing difficulties that affect the acquisition of reading and spelling”. It is now recognised as a neurodevelopmental difference rather than simply a difficulty with reading.

Dyslexia primarily affects phonological processing, as well as memory and processing speed. It can also impact working memory, spelling patterns and word retrieval. It exists on a spectrum, occurs across all abilities and often co-occurs with other differences such as ADHD or dyspraxia.

## Five Ways a Specialist School is Different







## 1. The learning experience is shaped around the child

In many schools, reasonable adjustments provide important support within a system that remains largely unchanged: extra time, adapted materials, or assistive technology layered onto existing expectations. These measures can make a meaningful difference, but students are still often asked to adapt to the way the system works.

In a specialist setting such as Frewen College, the approach is more individualised from the outset. Learning is designed to reflect how dyslexic students process, engage with and demonstrate understanding. Teaching is structured, multisensory and appropriately paced, creating opportunities for students to access learning in ways that work for them.

Assessment is flexible and responsive, recognising that students may communicate their knowledge most effectively through presentations, discussion, visual responses, practical application or project-based learning.

Rather than relying on continual adjustments to improve access, accessibility is embedded into the educational experience itself. The result is a more personalised learning environment, where students can build confidence, develop independence and engage fully with their strengths as learners.

## 2. Specialist understanding is embedded, not added on





In mainstream settings, understanding of dyslexia can vary between teachers, departments and subjects. Even where support is well intentioned, this inconsistency can mean students must repeatedly explain their needs, adapt to different teaching styles or work harder to access learning.

At Frewen College, specialist support is not confined to individual interventions or a small learning support team. Recognised as the world's oldest specialist dyslexia school, Frewen has built a whole-school culture grounded in deep expertise and a shared understanding of how dyslexia affects learning, processing and organisation.

Across every subject, staff use evidence-informed strategies as part of everyday teaching, from chunked instructions and visual scaffolds to multisensory approaches, flexible recording methods and carefully structured learning routines. These practices are not exceptional accommodations; they are embedded expectations, enabling all students to aspire, believe, and achieve.

### 3. Support is proactive, not reactive

In many settings, support is introduced once difficulties become visible, when a student falls behind or loses confidence. While important, this reactive approach means the student has often already experienced frustration or failure.

At Frewen College, specialist teaching and support is delivered in a transdisciplinary manner through our core offer. Lessons are carefully structured, have clear routines and provide consistent, appropriate scaffolding. The use of evidence-based teaching strategies delivered through multi-sensory and whole brain learning techniques, alongside support for executive functioning, means students make consistent progress.

### 4. Independence is taught, not assumed

Reasonable adjustments can improve access to learning, but they do not always equip students with the strategies and self-awareness needed to manage learning independently.

At Frewen College, developing independence is a deliberate part of the educational journey; we explicitly teach students how they learn, how they organise themselves and how they can approach challenges effectively.

Students are supported to develop practical strategies for organisation, memory, planning, revision and task management, alongside a deeper understanding of their own learning profile. Through specialist teaching and consistent reinforcement across the curriculum, these skills become embedded habits rather than isolated interventions. Frewen equips young people with the tools, resilience and self-advocacy skills to navigate an ever-changing world.

### 5. High expectations without constant struggle

There is a misconception that more specialised schools lower expectations; at Frewen, this could not be further from the truth. Our expectations remain high, with students sitting a fully mainstream curriculum, but our approach is different.

Our teaching methods and pacing are carefully aligned with each student's needs, enabling them to access the same level of challenge in a way that works for them. This allows students to experience success more consistently, building confidence and helping them recognise themselves as capable learners. Everything we do is guided by our core values: aspire, believe, achieve, supporting and encouraging every student to grow in both self-belief and attainment.

## What Families Often Ask About Dyslexia



### Will my child still achieve academically?

Yes. Expectations remain high, but teaching is tailored to how dyslexic learners process information, helping students build understanding, make meaningful progress and achieve genuine success. At Frewen College, our students go on to university, apprenticeships and full-time employment, demonstrating what is possible with the right support.

### Will my child be understood without having to explain everything?

Many students are used to advocating for themselves in every lesson. In a specialist setting, their needs are already understood, reducing that pressure and allowing them to focus on learning. At Frewen College, we ensure we get to know each student as an individual, understanding their strengths and how they learn best.

### Are we making the right decision?

This is often the biggest question of all. Choosing a different path can feel daunting, but for many families, finding the right environment is what allows their child to truly move forward. We work closely with families to ensure each student feels understood, supported, and able to grow in confidence, helping both child and parent feel reassured that the decision leads to positive change.

At Frewen College, the difference lies not simply in the level of support, but in how dyslexia is understood and embedded in every aspect of teaching. When learning is designed in this way, students can focus less on coping and more on developing skills and knowledge. As a result, confidence grows, independence strengthens, and learning becomes a more positive experience. Students move beyond simply coping to genuinely flourishing.

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