



Frequently Asked Questions

The Learning Support department provides support to students which complements the teaching and learning they receive in class. We primarily provide support to students who are experiencing barriers to their learning, with some additional support which can be accessed by any student in the school.

About the Learning Support department

What is the Learning Support department?

The Learning Support department primarily supports students who are experiencing barriers to their learning. This barrier could be due to:

- neurodiversity, such as ADHD, autism or a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia etc)
- a physical disability
- a temporary health difficulty which affects their learning
- a social, emotional or mental health difficulty which is having an adverse affect on their learning.

Many young people manage well independently, but the Learning Support department is available for students who need further help. Some students are supported by us throughout their time at the school. Others come to us as and when they need assistance.

What can the Learning Support department provide?

The department is based in Talbot House. We have a quiet shared study space for students to use. We run drop-in clinics for the Lower and Middle School and a very successful peer mentor programme, in which younger students can learn from Lower Sixth volunteers. These are available to all students in the school.

For students who need further support because they are experiencing barriers to their learning, we can:

- Create an Individual Education Plan, outlining the strengths a student has and the difficulties they face. This would be shared with all teachers of a student and will include suggestions on how they can help a student in the classroom. The student and parents/carers are consulted in the process of writing this plan.
- Provide access to small group sessions on study skills and strategies to overcome learning barriers.
- Set up one-to-one lessons with one of our Learning Support teachers.

What makes help from Learning Support most effective?

We find two principles make Learning Support effective: consent and openness. We cannot provide effective help if a student does not consent to working with us. While we must share certain information with school staff to ensure students are safe and can flourish at the school, any further information shared is done with the student's and/or parental consent.

Learning Support is most effective when there is open communication between students and Learning Support teachers. Students have to have an open mind to trying new strategies and ideas which may help their progress. When students and families are open in sharing information with their classroom teachers, they receive better support in school.

Is Learning Support common at Sevenoaks School?

The numbers of students who receive Learning Support fluctuates from year to year. Usually 10-12 per cent of students have some contact with the Learning Support department each year. This is in line with averages in all schools nationally.

How is receiving Learning Support viewed by the school?

The school sees itself as a welcoming place that is open to difference and diversity. Teachers are open-minded and keen to help students who have difficulties with learning for various reasons. Teachers also share their experiences of their own neurodiversity or other barriers to learning.

While students may feel self-conscious about receiving Learning Support at first, we are open with them about how many students receive assistance from us and this allows them to grow in confidence. Students frequently cite Learning Support as one of the best things about the school in their exit interviews with the Headmaster.

Any student, regardless of neurodiversity or another need, can access some of the support the department provides, such as the peer mentor programme or drop-in clinics. These are well-received by the students who use them.

Accessing help for my child

How do I know if my child needs help from the Learning Support department?

If your child is experiencing undue difficulty with their learning and they fit into one of these categories, then they may need help from the department:

- neurodiversity, such as ADHD, autism or a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia etc)
- a physical disability
- a temporary health difficulty which affects their learning
- a social, emotional or mental health difficulty which is having an adverse affect on their learning.

If you're unsure, please contact your child's tutor, who can discuss this with you. They will consult with the Learning Support department as appropriate.

How can I help my child access help from the Learning Support department?

You should contact your child's tutor and divisional head, who can discuss this with you. They are best placed to start this conversation as they have an overview of your child's academic progress and wellbeing. They can refer you to the Learning Support department, and/or to other help available in school.

I think my child is neurodiverse.

Who can I contact to discuss this in school?

You should contact your child's tutor and divisional head, who can discuss this with you. As mentioned above, they are best placed to start this conversation as they have an overview of your child's academic progress and wellbeing. They can work with the Learning Support department to help you to decide what to do next. They can also gather specific feedback from teachers to help make decisions about what to do next.

Does my child need a diagnosis to access Learning Support?

No. We know that diagnoses can take a long time. We frequently support students whose difficulties are clearly evident to school staff and are awaiting diagnosis.

Can the Learning Support department diagnose special educational needs?

The department staff includes teachers qualified in cognitive educational testing, who can run some of the tests that can be used by Educational Psychologists. These teachers can identify barriers relating to specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia. They are able to run an in-school assessment for students and produce a report on the results. These assessments cannot lead to a formal diagnosis, but results can be used to:

- inform the teaching of these students
- make decisions on further help required
- apply for access arrangements in examinations.

The department cannot run assessments for ADHD or Autistic Spectrum Condition, but teachers are experienced in supporting students with these conditions and can give advice on how to approach a diagnosis in these areas.

What other support help can my child access in school?

The tutor and pastoral team provide a range of support in how students can best approach their learning.

The school can provide access to a quiet area in the Health Centre if students are overwhelmed. How to use this most effectively should be discussed with your child's tutor and divisional head. Frequent use of this area can affect a student's academic progress and social integration into the school.

Students can access counselling in school. More information and a self-referral form is available on Firefly. Several of the counsellors are therapists with experience of working with neurodiverse young people.

Access arrangements for examinations and university

My child needs access arrangements for examinations. What is the process for ensuring these are in place for GCSE and IB?

The Learning Support department maintains a list of students who need access arrangements in examinations. The arrangements agreed are recorded in a student's Individual Education Plan.

The Learning Support department will make applications to examination boards on your child's behalf. The Learning Support department will gather evidence to support your child's application and will get in contact with you if required.

Access arrangements will be trialled in summer and mock examinations. This gives the students a chance to practise using their access arrangements. This is also another way for the Learning Support department to gather evidence that your child needs these arrangements.

If you have any questions, you should contact your child's Learning Support teacher.

Will my child be disadvantaged by receiving access arrangements?

Access arrangements are intended to create a fairer examination system for students who have barriers to their learning. A student's need for access arrangements in examinations, such as access to a word processor or extra time, is not recorded on examination certificates. When applying to universities, we recommend declaring the need for access arrangements as universities are keen to ensure that their entrance examination and interview processes are fair.

There are downsides to some access arrangements, for example extra time does increase the length of examinations, leaving shorter breaks between examinations and more tiring days. The advantages and disadvantages of any access arrangement are weighed carefully when deciding whether to use these and are discussed with students and parents.

My child will be leaving school for university soon. How can I ensure that my child will still have access arrangements and support at university?

You should contact the student support services at your child's future university to find out how they assess students' needs and what assistance they can provide.

If required by the university, the Learning Support department can provide documents to support your requests for help at university. If your child has specific learning difficulties and has been assessed in school, the report on this assessment may be accepted by a university as evidence of your child's need for support.

Depending on your child's needs, you may wish to apply for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). This is the government's programme for providing additional support at university for students with learning difficulties, health problems or disabilities. More information on the DSA is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa>



To find out more about the Learning Support department

If you have a question which hasn't been answered here, please reach out to your child's tutor. They will be able to answer your question or pass it on to the right staff member to get you the information you need.



SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

Learning Support, Sevenoaks School, High Street, Sevenoaks Kent TN13 1HU

www.sevenoaksschool.org